

TALES
FROM
FOREIGN
LANDS

❖ KARINE ❖

BY

WILHELM JENSEN

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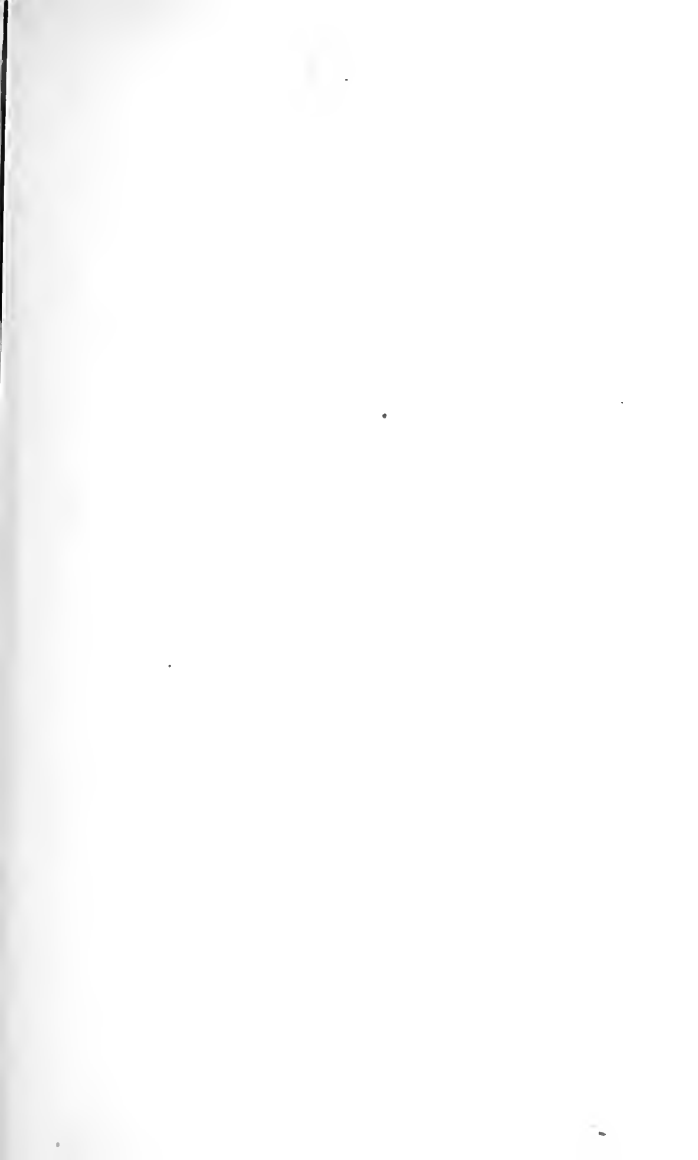
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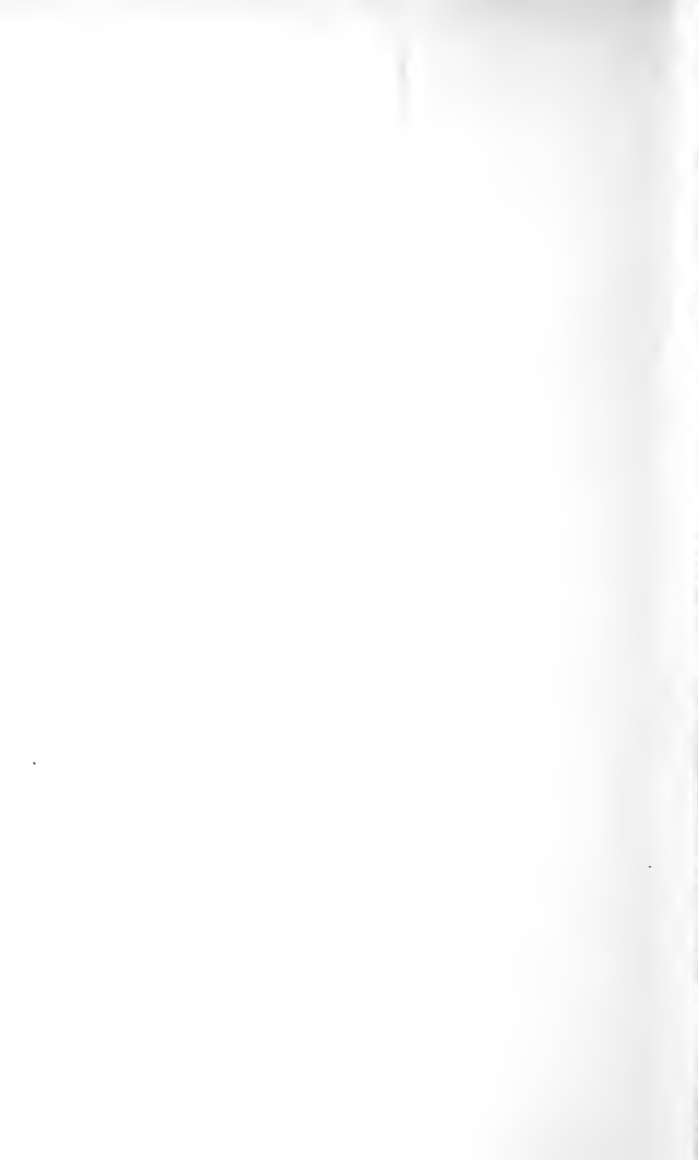
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KARINE

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KARINE

A STORY OF SWEDISH LOVE

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN

OF

WILHELM JENSEN

BY

EMMA A. ENDLICH

CHICAGO

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1896

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K A R I N E.

CHAPTER I.

BEHOLD the Falls of Trollhätta ! For ages they have thundered, — long before human ears were near to hear the sound of falling waters. Far over the rocks they scatter the glistening spray, while, below, the troubled waters seethe and toss. The child playing upon their brink becomes a man ; time touches his hair with silver ; and when, at the close of his life, he totters forth, leaning upon his staff, he finds them the same as they were at its beginning, — wreathed in flowers, like the spring-time ; white as winter's snow.

It is well for him who would forget, to sit by the waters of Trollhätta ; their roaring so stuns the ear

that it cannot hear the voices of the past. They approach, gently flowing, like the destiny of a human soul, — peaceful, transparent, kissing the nodding, overhanging grasses ; then a little eddy, a swifter motion, — imperceptible, unheeded, — yet the stillness, the clearness, have gone forever. More hastily they flow, still more hastily are driven, drawn, compelled, — until suddenly they plunge headlong into the all-devouring abyss.

When the first human beings came hither from the forests of the South, — flat-faced people, girded with shaggy skins, pursuing the reindeer with spears of flint, — the thunder of the Trollhätta was their only greeting. We know not whether it was years or centuries they dwelt upon its banks ; they left no record of their deeds. Only the waves of the Trollhätta whisper their story, — waves that were stained with the blood of these men, shed by white-faced conquerors who sailed across the Baltic in clumsy ships.

Irresistibly, uncontrollably, the nations of Europe hurried onward. Hymns of praise were sung to Odin ; and his descendants came down upon the earth to rule over Goths and Swedes. They were

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the Ynglings, and called themselves kings of Upsala. Their fame also has perished.

Again the South brought forth a revolution, new and world-stirring; and again the Baltic carried it northward. Far into the rocky fastnesses of the Snehättan flew the glad tidings of the Gospel of Peace; and a mighty race, the Folkungs, ascended the Swedish throne. Their kingdom grew great and strong; but with it grew fierce ambitions, the lust of gain and of power. Bloody wars arose; and those who held the highest places in the land were flung, crushed, into the deep, — like the foaming waters of Trollhätta.

Then, across the narrow belt of sea that parts Sweden from Zealand, came for the first time descendants of the Norsemen, who upon these islands had founded their sea-girt Viking home. A mighty hand had united the Danish people; and Sweden, shorn of its strength by internal feuds, fell an easy prey to the conqueror. At Falköping, not far from the Falls of Trollhätta, the nation surrendered to a woman, and Margaret of Denmark laid victorious hands upon Odin's descendants.

Deep and angry sounded the waters of Trollhätta,

proclaiming at once the victor's triumph and the shame of the vanquished. It was then that Karl Kanutson grasped his sword, and cut asunder the iron chains of Denmark. But the jealous lords who came after him abolished royalty. The rule passed into the hands of Sten Sture, and descended to his son and grandson, who were acknowledged as regents only. Sweden's glory and greatness were a delusion, for over it lay the shadow of the Union of Kalmar, forced upon it by Margaret, and according to which the kings of Denmark might rightfully wear the crowns of Sweden and Norway. That heretofore none of her successors had felt himself strong enough to claim his right, misled the short-sighted Swedish nobles.

Again the waters of Trollhätta rolled forth with ominous thunder-tones; this time, to meet the grandson of Margaret, when, sword in hand, he stepped upon Swedish soil, to realize by force the conditions of the treaty. After the bloody battle of Brännkyrka, Christian II. fled before Sten Sture. But he came again. Sten Sture fell; and the kind, firm hand, which, for his country's weal, had checked the stubborn will of its nobles, lay bleed-

ing in the dust. Laughing, Christian II. reached after the Swedish crown, which was more willingly surrendered by the lords to him than to one of their own number. He was crowned in the church at Stockholm. Then he received the Holy Sacrament, and swore an oath, both to guard the Swedish constitution, and to take no vengeance for the past.

For three November days there was great rejoicing in the streets of Stockholm. Night was turned into day, and in the king's palace the lights burned until sunrise. There the Swedish nobles drained cup after cup in honor of their most courteous king. Smiling, Christian walked through the wine-drinking, joy-bewildered crowd; embraced the bishops, kissed the councillors, and warmly pressed the hand of the burgomaster of Stockholm. Then the king clapped his hands and sang a merry song in honor of his guests.

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Fair and lovely was that November day in the year 1520. The setting sun gilded the red roofs of Stockholm, and threw crimson lights upon the smooth surface of Mälär Lake. Deep peace, the

peace of the dying year, seemed to brood over Sweden's capital, the stillness contrasting strangely with the noisy merry-making so lately heard in the streets.

Even now, with five times as many inhabitants as then, the inland districts of Sweden are but thinly settled. The lakes, the rugged mountain solitudes, remain unchanged ; but between them lie broad acres of fertile land, which in those days was scarcely more than a desert. The great lakes, the Mälar, Hjelmars, and Wener, stretch their vast lengths from east to west, almost the entire width of the land ; and southward lies the mighty Lake Wetter. Between them, smiling valleys alternate with rocky cliffs ; sombre pine-forests with bright beech-groves ; over all, as over the roofs of the capital, lie the slanting rays of the setting sun, mild, as with a premonition of springtime. It shone upon the silent waters of Hjelmars ; upon the long waves of Mälar, which plashed gently against the stone steps of the palace at Stockholm ; upon pointed village spires ; upon turrets and battlements of lonely castles, that rose above the shining waters and autumnal forests ; farther west-

ward, upon the ocean-like expanse and the countless islands of Lake Wener, from whose southern extremity the Göta-Elf rushes forth to meet the Cattegat.

Then come the Falls of Trollhätta.

The boatman upon Lake Wener, when the air is still, can hear its notes of warning ; and high up in the air, the startled birds suddenly turn aside in their flight. The uproar increases as we approach, until the ear is stunned, and the eye confusedly beholds the foaming mass, as it plunges over precipices into the frightful chasm below. A bed of naked granite receives it. Walls, steep-rising as if built by giant hands, force the wild, unbridled torrent into its narrow channel. Here and there, in a cleft of the rock, a lonely tree has taken root, and sways before the evening wind.

Over Lake Wener a breeze blew in gentle gusts, over the moss-grown rocks at the head of the cataract, and, in passing, stripped with soft, invisible hands the last leaves from their branches.

Rocky ground, scantily covered with moss and heather, reached upward from the brink of the Trollhätta, a hundred feet or more, to the barren

summit, upon which stood three solitary trees, waving their leafless branches against the evening sky. Here and there bare rocks rose from the ground, shaped like huge tables and rude seats of giants; and from one of these a hand was stretched forth to catch a fluttering leaf,—a small hand, with fine, transparent fingers. A round white arm, as if formed of luminous marble, was lifted up against the horizon. Was it Freya, perchance, come to seek for Odur, and sitting upon the hoary giant's seat? Was it she of whom the poets sang of old, that in her eyes lay the light of eternal springtime? A golden light seemed to come from the hair that fell from the parting down to the rugged stone. The setting sun threw its last rays upon it until one could scarcely distinguish where the golden threads ended and the sun began. Who was she? Had she risen from the depths of the Trollhätta, to bathe her fair brow in the rosy evening light? Had she grown cold down yonder, that she needs must rise and warm herself in the ruddy glow of life, before a long winter should bind her fast in icy fetters? Not so. Her hair might indeed turn into liquid gold, arms and brow might harden

into gleaming alabaster ; but no gem lies hidden in the deep places of the earth from which nature's magic could fashion such eyes, — eyes that belonged to our world, and to the northern sky, which had lent them its mysterious light, its nameless charm of mingled mirth and sadness.

She rose, and the shadow of her tall figure fell across the torrent. A long garment fell from her half-bared throat to her feet. Somewhat after the fashion of a Grecian tunic, it was folded across the bosom, and the girdle which confined it was curiously wrought in threads of gold and silver. Narrow bands, passing over the shoulders, supported this graceful dress, and from beneath them flowed sleeves of spotless linen. No living being besides was in sight. The wind grew stronger, bending the branches of the trees, and stirring the low brushwood that grew along the river's edge. It blew in sudden gusts, shaking the dry leaves, and as suddenly ceased. Only in one spot the motion continued. It seemed as if an aspen were quivering among the bushes, and moving down the hill-side toward the river. But the keenest ear could not have heard, and none but the most observant

eye have seen the motion. For a moment it seemed as if the young girl had perceived it. She turned from the sinking sun, and looked up the stream; but the fiery ball had blinded her eyes, and the wind, blowing from Lake Wener, again shook the yellow leaves. Again it brought something, — not a dead leaf this time, but a rare butterfly, with crimson spots upon its snow-white wings. Vainly struggling, it was borne past her toward the water. For a moment she hesitated, then, by a sudden impulse, ran lightly down the steep hillside.

About fifty steps away, precisely where the aspen at that moment seemed to be trembling among the bushes, a head was lifted above the brown leaves; two clear gray eyes gazed with dismay at the white figure, hurrying down the dangerous slope, and a pair of strong arms parted the branches so violently that the crackling was distinctly audible by the river-side. But in her anxiety to save the butterfly, the girl heard nothing. Again and again she stretched out her hand to grasp it; but, fearful of hurting the delicate creature, the slender fingers missed their hold. Farther

down it fluttered, and more dangerous grew the steep path. The gray eyes, which had meanwhile come nearer, saw the danger, — a crumbling stone, a misstep, and she would be carried down into the wild waters. In vain his loud and angry cry of warning; in vain her endeavor to save the life which the Trollhätta seemed to draw with irresistible force. For a moment the butterfly struggled against the spray, then fell exhausted, with folded wings, upon the water, when the girl's outstretched hand caught and held it. But at the same time the tuft of grass that supported her yielded under her knees. Uttering a low cry, she vainly reached behind. A great wave rolled toward her; the treacherous grass sank more and more.

“Gustav!” she cried in terror, “Gustav!”

“I am here;” and wildly the man leaped over the last bushes, stumbled, and struck the ground near the river's edge. But his right hand, clutching the soil, held him, while his left caught the careless girl, dragging her with superhuman strength from the perilous brink. Aided by his grasp, she quickly regained her footing, and with wonder and gratitude turned to look at her

deliverer. She half held out her hand, but drew it back as she met his look of undisguised admiration. He seemed to be about thirty years old; his irregular but clearly cut features wore an expression of strength and energy foreign to the usual Swedish type. Dark hair fell carelessly over his forehead, and his clothing told of fierce struggles with briars and hedges. At the young girl's hesitation, an angry, scornful look came into his face.

"Is your life not worth the trouble of thanking the preserver of it?" he asked.

His tone was more annoying even than his words. A crimson flush rose to the cheeks of the girl. She proudly lifted her head and an equally caustic reply hovered on her lips. But in a moment she felt that in the form and not in the words lay the rudeness, and that, indeed, had it not been for his strong arm she would not have been standing before him at that minute, so she replied, —

"I thought you were —"

He interrupted her. "You called me: I heard you; and I saw that without my help you would

perish, — you and the creature you so foolishly sought to save. You know this; and you know, furthermore, that according to the custom of our land I have the right to kiss your lips; and that I am very forbearing to claim no other reward than this.” With these words he caught her hand and kissed it.

She looked him calmly in the face, then cast down her eyes; there was something in the stranger’s manner that forbade resistance. As he held her hand, she glanced down at the other, where the butterfly was carefully stretching his long antennæ as he crept from between the sheltering fingers. He made no attempt to escape; but, as if to thank her, he spread his white wings with their crimson spots. The young man, observing him, said curtly, —

“Do you not know that fools who rush into danger must be allowed to have their own way, and that those who would save them only imperil their own lives? Who had helped me, had I been as foolish — as you?” he broke off with a harsh laugh.

The girl shuddered. Was it the sudden coolness of the air, or the stranger’s odd manner, and the lonely wilderness?

"I do not fear the Trollhätta," she replied ; "I have known it since my childhood, and it has never done me harm."

"The Trollhätta!" he exclaimed. "Is this your boasted Trollhätta? Let me look at the famous monster!" and with a leap he reached the rocky ledge that overhangs the precipice. He bent over to look down into the turbulent waters, until the young girl cried out in terror. Her voice failed to reach him; but when he turned and saw her troubled face, he came back shaking his dripping hair.

"This is pleasant to the hunted hare, when the hounds are upon his track," he said. The girl looked at him anxiously; she began to doubt the stranger's sanity. "Had I fallen from yonder ledge, you would scarcely have cared to go and see what had become of my bones. But the hounds would have lost the scent in the water, and their masters would have rewarded them with blows."

With knitted brows he looked about him, then suddenly catching her wrist in a strong grasp, he drew her a few steps upward toward the water, and, pointing to it, said in a low voice, —

“Who that could not hear, and only saw it thus, calm and transparent, with the sunset reflected upon its smooth surface, would believe that deeper down the swift current was already rushing onward, and that whosoever trusted it would be carried away and dashed to pieces? And yet, I tell you, your Trollhätta is a plaything compared to a stream I know of, — one still more gentle and smiling, that kisses and caresses; and those who stand upon its brink are deaf and blind. They do not see the abyss that opens before them, neither do they hear the thundering uproar that will drown their dying screams. Think of me when you hear of him. His name is —” he had spoken rapidly. “What is your name?” he interrupted himself.

“Katharine Stenbock,” she answered simply; the name was one of the noblest in Sweden, and its effect upon the stranger was startling. He stepped back in surprise, and, measuring the girl with his eyes, said with more chivalrous deference than he had hitherto shown, —

“Truly, the blindness of our country is infectious, or I should have known the Rose of the Trollhätta.” A strangely winning smile accompanied

his words. "I had formed a different idea of your beauty, Karine, thanks to our poets, whose eyes, methinks, are as dull as their swords. I thank you ; in saving your life, I have at least done one thing worthy of immortality."

Karine blushed. She had been mistaken in doubting the stranger's sanity ; but her conscience pricked her for listening to such language, and yet there was a subtle fascination in his manner and voice. The twilight deepened ; the wind grew stronger, driving heavy clouds across Lake Wener ; but the young man seemed to have forgotten the object of his coming, and his eyes rested with a dreamy light upon Karine's delicate profile.

"It is growing dark ; I must go home," she said at last. He stood motionless. She took a few steps, then turned. There was something she wished to ask, but could not find words. Suddenly he passed his hand over his face, and, with the old expression in his eyes and voice, asked abruptly, —

"Karine Stenbock, has your father gone to Stockholm?"

She shook her head. "He was going, but he

hurt his foot, and could not mount his horse. I was glad."

"You were glad? Do you grudge him the kiss of Christian of Denmark?"

"It is not noble to accept an enemy's hospitality, — nor wise," she said slowly.

The stranger came nearer. "You pass harsh judgment upon the nobles of our land. Do you know that your words might cost you your life? To-day Christian of Denmark is King of Sweden; and if he honors your father's house with his presence, you yourself will do obeisance to the Dove of Amsterdam."

Karine's head rose proudly; a flash of angry light broke from her eyes. "Then I should be sorry that you saved my life," she said with quivering lips. The stranger's words had opened the flood-gates of passionate feeling; but she controlled herself, and added in her usual tone, "I do not know who you are, that think you can intimidate a maiden; but there are still men in Sweden who with their own blood would save her daughters from such shame."

He failed to perceive the question that lay in her

words, and replied, "You have a brave heart, Karine ! But do you know one such man? Can you tell me his name?"

"And if I knew but one, it has chanced before now that one man, who was truly a man, has delivered his people from slavery. Yes," she continued eagerly, looking full into the eyes that were bent upon her in such anxious scrutiny; "and if I trusted to no other arm than that of Gustav Erikson —" She paused, startled at his harsh, discordant laugh, which the rocks flung back a hundred times multiplied.

"Do you know Gustav Erikson, Karine Stenbock?" he asked.

Pained and frightened, she shook her head.

"You are speaking from hearsay," he said, after a pause. "Shall I tell you what your boasted deliverer of Sweden is in reality? Like a hunted hare before Danish bloodhounds, he flies from land to land. He sees the slaves of Christian II. ill-use women and children, and stops his ears to shut out their cries. He sees the misery of his people, and has no remedy save impotent curses. He is a cowardly rascal, who hides in ditches at night to save

his wretched life, — a sparrow, swearing vengeance against the vulture who spoiled his nest. He starts when he hears the clashing of iron, or the creaking of dry branches in the forest.” He paused, and as if to illustrate his words, suddenly raised his head and listened attentively. For the space of a few seconds he remained in this attitude ; then he said quickly, —

“Karine Stenbock, I must pass this night in your father’s house. You seem to think well of Gustav Erikson, — do not be offended with me ; my anger was not against him, but against his hard fate, and the fate of his country.”

“I have never seen him,” she said gently, “and yet I think I know him better than you do.”

“You think so? Perhaps you are right. Defend him always, Karine ; the day may come when he will be able to thank you. Truly, as I know Gustav Erikson, he would be the man to snatch the crown from the head of Christian of Denmark, and lay it at the feet of Karine Stenbock, because she believed in him when he despaired of himself. For this reason I have asked permission to pass the night in your father’s house. Like Gustav Vasa, I am

pursued, and tracked by Danish bloodhounds ; and whatever kindness you show to me is shown to one who hates the enemies of our people with as bitter a hatred as does Gustav Vasa." He spoke with such dignity and grace that Karine involuntarily held out her hand to him.

"Come," she said ; "although I do not know your name, if you are an enemy of Denmark, you are welcome in Gustav Stenbock's house."

The stranger exclaimed : "Have these evil times failed to make you careful, Karine? For aught you know, I may be a spy of Christian's, sent here to bring destruction to your house. Do you not know the king's threat against those who shelter the proscribed? What matters it, if one more nameless fugitive perish, when the well-being of your household is at stake? I thank you, Karine, for your goodwill ; but I have slept too many nights under the open sky to fear another. Farewell —"

"You may know Gustav Erikson better than I, but you surely do not know Gustav Stenbock, if you think that fear could move him to deny aid to any friend of Sweden," Karine gravely inter-

rupted ; “and say what you will, I do not believe that mistrust of one another will bring back a nation’s freedom, and that — ”

“And what, Karine ? ” he asked.

“That if your eyes spoke false, little would be lost in Sweden’s freedom ! ” she added. At her words a wave of joy swept through the young man’s heart. He silently followed her up the hillside, from whose summit she had but lately watched the setting sun. Toward the west, the sky was still blue, and a gold-gleaming girdle of light bounded the horizon. From the east, heavy clouds were approaching, among which blue lights darted to and fro. The rocky slope was steep, and they paused for a moment at the top. To the south, east and west, the view extended far into the darkening landscape. Northward, it was confined by the high Trollhätta hills.

“The storm comes from Stockholm,” muttered the stranger. “I knew it would come ; the last days were too serene.”

“That is our past ; over yonder lies Sweden’s future,” said Karine, pointing to the golden splendor in the west. He smiled bitterly.

“But it fades before our eyes ; and when another sun rises, our day is over.” Angrily his foot struck the ground. “Curses upon him,” he exclaimed, “who harbors such thoughts ; and who does not gladly give his all to restore the freedom of this land ; and curses upon your beauty, Karine, if you use it otherwise than to reward the deliverer of Sweden !”

The first peal of thunder, low and continuous, rolled through his angry words. Karine, her cheeks aflame, hurried down the gentle slope that led to her home. Heavy drops began to fall. Before them in the twilight lay a dense grove of trees, — lindens with leafless limbs, and high-branching elms, still covered with sombre foliage. Through them appeared the gray walls and tile-covered roof of an old building.

“Is that Torpa ?” the stranger asked. Karine nodded. “And your mother — Brita Rosen — is she at home ?”

She looked up, astonished. “You seem to know us ; and it is but just that I should be able to say the same of you when I commend you to my father’s hospitality.”

"You are right, Karine," he answered quickly ; "my name is Gustav Folkung ; and if I may ask still another favor at your hands, it is that you will not let your parents know of our meeting. Let me slip unnoticed into a stable and pass the night upon the hay."

She repeated the name, "Gustav Folkung?" and added musingly, "I have heard of you ; you are a friend of Sweden, as are all who bear that name. No ; there is room to spare in the house, and only my mother is at home."

"Yes," said Folkung, more to himself than to his companion ; "they have hunted me hard these last days, and sleep would indeed be pleasant. Karine, I do not mistrust your household, but a secret is safer in one hand than in two. Promise me, whatever happens, that you will not betray me. As you know, I am very weary ; before the day dawns, I shall be gone."

Karine nodded. "I do not know your reasons. But you have saved my life, and you are the enemy of our enemies ; I promise not to betray your presence. Come."

They had reached the dense darkness of the

elms. The rain now fell in torrents upon the trees, and drowned the sound of their footsteps. Karine walked in silence, lost in thought. "It is the only safe plan," she suddenly murmured, but loud enough for him to catch her words and ask their meaning. She hurriedly explained that there was one room in the house which under no circumstances would be entered at night, and thither she would lead him. Soon the mansion lay before them, wrapped in darkness; only from the ground-floor, and from an apartment in the story above, there shone a light. The first burned in a room near the entrance; and they saw the sturdy faces of man-servants and maids, moving about the flickering oil-lamp.

Karine avoided the open door, and led the stranger, through what seemed to be a garden, to the rear of Castle Torpa. Here the east wind howled more fiercely, dashing the heavy rain-drops against the wall. The keen ears of a watch-dog had already caught the sound of approaching footsteps, and he growled angrily, until Karine called him by name. With a joyful bark, the dog bounded toward his mistress, but growled again at the sight of the stranger.

“Hush, Björn ; it is a Swede, — no Dane ;” and with one more short bark, he crouched contentedly at her side.

She then passed her hand along the wall, pushed back a heavy bolt, and opened a door, through which they entered. This she carefully relocked ; they ascended a dark flight of stairs, and groped their way through narrow passages, until they reached a second door, to which Karine carried the key. A different air out of the darkness met Folkung, recalling to him, in the midst of bleak November winds, the breath of spring. He had scarcely crossed the threshold when his guide whispered hurriedly, —

“I dare not bring you a light, — it would betray you, — nor dare you make any noise ; my mother’s room adjoins this, and her hearing is very keen. My father has gone to visit a friend, and will not return before morning. As soon as I can, I will bring you food. Draw the bolt on the inside, and do not open, unless some one scratches the door and says, ‘Gustav Vasa.’ Yonder to the left,” and she hesitated for a moment, “you will find a bed. Lie down upon it and rest ; only —

only — if you would take off your boots ; ” and before Folkung realized her meaning, he heard her closing the door.

“ Remember the bolt,” she whispered from outside.

Instead of obeying, he opened wide the door and stared into the darkness. “ Karine ! ” he called, in a suppressed voice ; but no answer came to him ; only the wind whistled through the narrow passage-way. The window in the room was open, and the cold draught soon brought him to his senses. He closed the door, and fastened the bolt. Then he stepped to the window, whose outlines were dimly defined against the surrounding blackness, and tried to calculate, as he felt the rain beating in his face, how high he might be from the ground. He heard the glad barking of the dog, coming from the garden, and growing fainter as it approached the front of the house, clearly indicating the road the young girl had taken.

“ ‘ Gustav Vasa ’ is to be the pass-word, she says,” he murmured. “ She had better have said, Gustav Erikson is a fool, who has lost his wits since he held a woman’s hand in his.” He left the

window, and, groping with his hands, began to examine the room. The house was strongly built and well secured against wind and weather. Tall carved chests of drawers stood in the corners. He felt something smooth, like the wooden surface of a door; at the same time a ray of light fell through a crevice, and he heard a well-known voice. Folkung stopped to listen.

“Good-evening, mother,” Karine said.

“You were gone a long time,” her mother answered. “I believe it is growing dark.” The speaker was blind.

“It is night, mother,” the girl replied, “and stormy. I went to the Trollhätta, and there I saved the life of the last butterfly. You know it, —with the red stars on its wings, that flutters about the heights of Kinnekulle. He tried to fly over the Trollhätta, and fell into the water; but I saved him, and since then he has rested quietly on my hand.”

Every word reached Folkung through the door, and, tired as he was, he could not bring himself to leave his post. He heard the matron sigh, as she said, —

“It were better for him had you left him to his fate. Evil days are drawing near, — I feel it in my eyes, — days that will destroy what has hitherto been saved. Read to me, Karine, from the book I used to read to you when you were a child. Turn to the twelfth page, and read about the bard who sang of his forefathers’ brave deeds, but could not praise those of his own generation. He was blind, and in his grief he dashed his harp against the rocks of the Trolihätta.”

The listener heard the girl walk across the room. He softly groped his way back to the window; but in the darkness his hand, passing over a table, struck an object, which fell to the floor with a loud crash. He reached the bed, and flung himself upon it; then he heard the woman’s voice, —

“Is Björn in your room, Karine? I heard something fall. Let Ingeborg take a light, and see.”

The maid, who was sitting silent in a corner, rose, and reached after a candle; but Karine said quickly, —

“Stay, Björn is outside; but my window is open, and the wind rushes in. I need no light.”

She entered the room, leaving the door open behind her, and closed the window. The light from a massive and curiously wrought copper lamp fell into the chamber; and Folkung looked into the face of the woman who sat in an armchair by the table, gazing into vacancy. Around her forehead, high and finely arched, like her daughter's, clustered thickly her snowy hair. But her arms, bare to the elbows, after the fashion of her time, were round and white, and she was of a proud and majestic appearance. Folkung could not take his eyes from her face, and he whispered to himself, —

“You have grown old, Brita Stenbock; you were a beautiful woman in the olden days, when, in Sten Sture's house, I climbed up upon your knee, and tore from your neck John of Denmark's chain of honor.”

He was silent, for Karine approached. Her dress touched him in passing, and involuntarily he caught it, to detain her. He whispered her name and pressed the fold of her dress to his lips. But with a gentle effort she freed herself, and, returning to her mother, said laughing, “The storm will make no more noise,” and closed the door.

"We became acquainted an hour ago, — the storm and I," she explained.

Mistress Stenbock shrugged her shoulders. "Have you been gossiping with the earth-men by the Trollhätta, that you speak so foolishly? Read on. The storm does not seem to heed your wishes: it grows more violent; I feel it in my shoulder. I wish your father were at home, or at least Gustav —"

Folkung heard no more. He lay in a half-slumber, while troubled thoughts wandered through his brain. Outside, the wind shrieked and roared, and now and then Björn gave vent to his discomfort in a prolonged howl. Suddenly he awoke with a start, and gazed confusedly about him. The darkness was gone, and the room was flooded with light. At first he was bewildered; then he perceived that the moon was shining in at the window. But it was not the light that had wakened him; a sound, or rather, a succession of sounds, had startled his ear. A noise, like the rolling of thunder, approached from a distance, grew louder, and suddenly ceased. The secret guest of Castle Torpa strained his ear to listen.

Now he heard the neighing of horses, and the hurried tread of men's feet upon the broad staircase.

The door of the apartment, where sat the women of the Stenbock family, was flung open; and a man, broad-shouldered, and of gigantic proportions, crossed the threshold. Grizzled, storm-tangled locks hung about his bare forehead; his lips trembled from emotion, and from the pain in his injured foot. His cloak had dropped from his shoulder, behind which was seen the fair head of a young man, whose eyes eagerly sought Karine.

"Father!" she cried, starting from her seat in surprise, which a second glance turned into alarm. "What has happened to you, father?"

"To me?" Gustav Stenbock clutched his throat, as if to aid his reluctant speech; but no sound passed his lips.

"For God's sake, Gustav, what has happened?" Karine repeated, turning to the youth, who now stood by her side. He, too, was speechless; his clothing was drenched, and covered with a thick coat of mire. He trembled with excitement and weariness. A momentary silence lay upon them

all. It was broken by the voice of the mistress, who had risen, and, bending her head, asked, —

“Who came with Stenbock? Is it Gustav Rosen?”

“Yes, mother,” said Karine, whose face was hidden upon his breast, while with tender haste he kissed her cheek and brow.

Stenbock had flung his wet cloak upon the floor, and beckoned the youth with an angry motion of the hand, —

“Speak, Rosen; tell them all, — as you told it to me.”

Gustav Rosen gently loosened Karine’s encircling arms and approached Mistress Stenbock.

“Be seated, aunt,” he said, taking her hand, and leading her to her chair. “I bring you a greeting from Christian of Denmark.”

His words died away in the large room. The door by which the two men had entered stood open; and the men-servants, with anxious faces, crowded round their master. It was still as death; only, outside Björn howled dismally. Brita Stenbock asked sharply, —

“Why do you hesitate, Gustav Rosen? Sten-

bock's women must be men, when Sweden's men conduct themselves as women. What message do you bring from Christian of Denmark? The clasp of his hand is treason, and his greeting is death."

"You speak true, Brita," replied the youth. He grasped Karine's hand, and held it in his own. "Last evening I rode out of Stockholm," he continued with quivering lips. "Near Lake Wetter I met your father."

Again the blind woman sprang from her seat. "You deceived us, Stenbock? You were going to Christian of Denmark?" she exclaimed bitterly.

With a muttered oath, Stenbock threw down his sword. The young man hastened to explain.

"I told him that all the lords had followed the king's bidding, and I feared he might pay dearly for his refusal."

"The nobles of Sweden are cowards and traitors," cried the blind woman.

"You are unjust, Brita Stenbock," replied the young man; "they of whom you speak are deaf to praise or blame. Since last evening, the nobility of Sweden has ceased to exist; and the Mälar is red with their blood. Whoever feasted at Stockholm

with the Danish king, has paid for the banquet with his life. Christian of Denmark has beheaded the entire nobility of Sweden."

Whence did it come? A sudden shrill, discordant laugh rang through the silence that followed the last words. The speaker paused and looked around; Karine's hand trembled, and her face grew pale. Stenbock's eye ran searchingly over the heads of his retainers, who, as was the custom in Sweden, had gathered in the family room.

"Who laughs at Sweden's downfall?" he asked, with a threatening frown. No one answered. Karine stepped forward, and said, —

"It only sounded like laughter, father. It must have been the storm."

Rosen glanced toward the door that led into Karine's room. "It seemed to come from within there," he said. "What is it, Ingeborg?"

The girl had also turned toward the door. "There was a strange noise in there before you came, Herr Rosen; but Mistress Katharine had courage, and went in."

The youth went nearer, but Karine detained him. "Ingeborg is a silly girl who believes in ghosts,"

she said, catching his arm and gently drawing him away.

As if struck by lightning, Brita Stenbock had sunk back in her chair, covering her face with her hands. She had not heeded the interruption. She lifted her head ; and her face seemed turned to stone, as with unfaltering voice she asked :

“ Who were beheaded, Gustav Rosen? Tell me their names.”

“ Ask me who have escaped, and it will be easier to answer you,” he replied. “ They are here, — your husband — and myself.”

A strange expression flitted about Brita Stenbock’s lips. “ You too were in Stockholm, Rosen. How is it that you did not share the fate of the Swedish lords?”

“ I escaped by a lucky accident,” he returned, with embarrassment, avoiding Karine’s wistful, scrutinizing eyes.

The mistress of the house repeated his last words : “ By a lucky accident ! Rejoice, Karine ; otherwise Rosen’s head would be lying with the heads of the brave Swedish nobles.” In an icy tone she continued, “ And is no one left in whom

Sweden may trust, save Stenbock and — yourself?" The tone of her words roused Stenbock, who had stood lost in sad and bitter thoughts. He said angrily, —

"I think, Brita, this is not the time to recall past wrongs. You speak without reason. Has Gustav Rosen injured you by saving me? Has he done Christian of Denmark a service in preventing him from laying my head among the rest?"

"Mother!" exclaimed Karine; but her mother continued, with voice and features unchanged:

"I asked you, Rosen, whether any others had escaped."

The youth must have had good reasons for controlling himself, chief among them being the beautiful girl by his side; for he spoke more calmly than the others.

"I believe that Gustav Erikson is the only one who escaped; or rather, who did not go to Stockholm. The fox scented the trap—"

"Speak reverently of Gustav Vasa, boy," cried the woman, in a voice that suddenly silenced the speaker.

“Gustav Erikson,” she repeated musingly ; “he was but a child when he taught me what befits a Swedish woman. While he lives, nothing is lost.”

She raised her head, and turned her sightless eyes toward the young man.

“I do not wish to pain you, Gustav Rosen,” she continued ; “but hitherto you have been a boy. The time has come for you to prove whose blood flows in your veins, — your father’s, or the Danish blood of your mother.”

Karine cast a satisfied glance upon her betrothed.

“Gustav has a true Swedish heart, mother, — as true as yours and mine ; as my father’s and Gustav Vasa’s,” she said. “But it is growing late ; you should go to rest, and to-morrow consider what can be done.”

Stenbock shook his head. “To-morrow it may be too late ; Christian is swift as the plague.”

Rosen assented. “A command has been issued to search the country for those whose names stand upon the list of the executioner Slaghök. It was at his instigation that Archbishop Trolle made the accusations —”

“God’s curse upon the traitor —” Brita Stenbock’s passionate exclamation was followed by a howl from Björn, fiercely barking, as he bounded up the stairs.

“All the senators, two bishops, the burgomaster and councillors of Stockholm were executed,” Rosen continued excitedly. “The gates were suddenly closed, and the streets filled with Danish soldiers who had been brought into the town at night. Whoever witnessed the executions, and was heard to utter a word of sympathy or reproach, was immediately seized and made to share the same fate. Upon his knees Archbishop Trolle besought the king to execute the Pope’s ban against the prisoners —”

Loud words and the clashing of arms interrupted Rosen. Björn dashed into the room, whining, and, with eyes sparkling, sprang upon Karine. A servant, following in breathless haste, exclaimed, “Master, hide yourself. The Danes have come to seek you, and we are too few to resist them.”

Stenbock’s mighty form rose proudly. He grasped the hilt of his sword, and with a firm, loud voice replied, —

“Why should I flee from my own house? I have committed no crime.”

At the same moment a Danish officer, a drawn sword in his hand, entered the room, followed by a number of soldiers armed with halberds. So sudden was their appearance that, with the exception of the master, none had overcome the first feeling of angry surprise. It had kindled a ghastly light in Brita Stenbock's sightless eyes, which turned with a look of deadly hate toward the intruders. Karine's heart beat loudly; and her eyes rested with feverish anxiety upon the door that led to her chamber, while Gustav Rosen slipped into one of the deep window-recesses, turning his flushed face toward the darkness without. Ingeborg, the maid, sat in her corner, hiding her face and loudly lamenting. Björn kept his sparkling eyes fixed upon the Danes, and, with a low growl, threw himself upon the floor near the door of his mistress' room.

The Danish captain, after a searching glance through the apartment, approached the master of the house, who stood calmly awaiting him.

“Gustav Stenbock?” he asked abruptly.

Stenbock nodded without changing his position.

“His Majesty, King Christian II. of Sweden, sends you this message: he deeply regrets that you disdained his invitation to Stockholm, but he is willing to forget that you have grieved him by your absence, and his clemency is content to lay no heavier punishment upon your disobedience than to forbid you, at the peril of your life, to leave your estates, until he himself shall be pleased to grant you permission.”

Stenbock breathed hard. “No man has the right to imprison a nobleman of Sweden without sentence of Parliament,” he answered.

The officer turned indifferently from him to the servants of the house, from whose ranks a sullen murmur had followed his words.

“It is the will of his Majesty that any resistance be immediately punished. Put the rebel in chains and carry him to Stockholm,” he commanded, pointing to one of Stenbock’s servants. The soldiers seized the unfortunate man, none of whose fellow-servants dared come to his assistance; but Stenbock clutched convulsively the hilt of his sword. The captain, observing his movement, continued, —

“His Majesty will be rejoiced to hear how faithful and obedient a servant he possesses in you, Master Stenbock. He has no doubt that you refuse to harbor treasonable fugitives, upon whose head a price is set. Nevertheless, I have strict orders to search every dwelling in this neighborhood ; and I regret that I cannot, at this late hour, spare you the inconvenience. Begin with the adjoining room,” he added, turning to his men.

But Stenbock’s power of self-control was exhausted. Heedless of his injured foot, with one leap he sprang before the mercenaries, and, drawing his sword, barred their way to the door.

“Tell Christian of Denmark,” he cried, “that he may well regret not having been able to lay my head among those of the other Swedish lords ; and I still more regret that he is not present at this moment instead of his satellites, that I might requite the hospitalities of Stockholm.”

These words were spoken with bitter scorn, and accompanied by a hissing flourish of his sword. The soldiers started back, and gazed in dismay at

the gray, herculean figure. The Danish captain frowned, and the heavy veins upon his forehead grew purple in his rage. He beckoned to the halberdiers who stood behind him, and said in an imperious tone, —

“Your life were forfeited, Gustav Stenbock, were I to use my full powers. In the name of King Christian, — give place.”

The halberds moved forward in a serried line, but Stenbock stood motionless. Then, with a look of proud satisfaction, he threw his arm around his daughter, who had flown to his side and stood as unflinchingly as the old man himself. But the iron blades never paused. They were accustomed to blood; and in the fierce wars of conquest and destruction which the Danish monarch had waged against Sweden, Karine's would not have been the first woman's breast they pierced. Not a muscle moved in the captain's hard face; only a few seconds more, and the glittering lances would have cleared the way to the door.

But there was another person present who had been a silent witness of the scene, watching with growing uneasiness the progress of events. At the

entrance of the Danes, Rosen's embarrassment and his evident desire to escape notice had been unmistakable. He had heard in silence the dispute between Stenbock and the captain ; a tremor shook his frame when he saw Karine's sudden movement to her father's side. He was, no doubt, too well acquainted with the intruders to hope that they would desist from their purpose.

"Hold !" Gustav Rosen suddenly shouted, throwing himself between Karine and the soldiers, who paused, startled by the suddenness of his appearance. The captain turned and rudely asked, —

"Who are you ? What do you want ?"

The young man told his name, and in a low tone added some words in Danish, at which the officer's manner suddenly changed. He uncovered his head, and hastily beckoned his men to step back. Then he began, —

"Your pardon, sir ; I had no suspicion of your presence here. I pray you will assure his Majesty —"

Rosen interrupted him. "This lady is my betrothed, and it is her room which you bade your

men enter. You will understand Master Stenbock's refusal ; and my word of honor is scarcely needed to convince you that no one is concealed there."

The captain looked embarrassed. "Excuse me, Herr Rosen," he answered, with hesitation ; "but my orders —"

Gustav Rosen frowned, but after a moment's reflection he replied, "You are right ; your orders must be obeyed. You will doubtless be content if I take upon myself your office, so as to satisfy the letter of the king's command." The young man spoke with unwonted energy and defiance, and the officer silently bowed assent, his manner expressing a fear that he had gone too far in insisting upon his demand. He endeavored to repair his mistake by taking a position so remote from Karine's room that neither his eyes nor his ears could take any part in the search.

Stenbock now began to realize the danger into which he was about to plunge himself and his family ; he stepped aside, leaving the door free, upon whose latch Rosen laid his hand.

"Forgive me, Karine," he said, looking around ;

“you know — ” but Karine no longer stood beside him. In the confusion caused by his sudden appearance, she had slipped away unnoticed. She hurried through the long dark passages until she reached the door by which Folkung had been admitted. In breathless haste, she shook it violently, then, remembering, she gently scratched the wood, and whispered, “Gustav Vasa.”

The door opened immediately, and the fugitive stood before her in the bright moonlight.

“You gave me your word, Karine, and Gustav Vasa waited.”

“Come quickly,” she urged, not heeding his words, and hurried him through the narrow gallery by which they had entered. At the same moment Gustav Rosen opened the opposite door, and Björn bounded into the chamber. Rosen stood upon the threshold, and to allay all suspicion called Ingeborg to bring him a light.

“Do not go in alone, Herr Rosen,” she pleaded ; as with trembling hands she lighted the candle, “all is not as it should be in there.”

In the hall clanked the footsteps of the Danish

soldiers, setting out upon their search. Ingeborg retreated to her corner; and Rosen, shading the flickering light with his hand, looked carefully about him. Suddenly he stopped short, as if rooted to the spot. Björn stood erect beside Karine's bed, eagerly sniffing the air. The silken pillows hung to the ground; the soft couch was crushed, as if by a heavy weight, and the snowy linen was stained with damp clay.

Half stupefied, he stared before him. Ingeborg's warning, the harsh laughter, Karine's assurance, "Believe me, it is the wind," as she gently forced him away, and finally, her mysterious disappearance, — all crowded in bewildering confusion through his brain. The light from his candle fell upon the floor; the wet tracks of a man's iron-heeled boot crossed each other to and fro, coming from the outer door and leading back to it. Björn scented them, and, springing against the door, which Karine had forgotten to fasten, it yielded, and the dog darted silently through the dark gallery. Gustav Rosen drew his sword, and rushed after him. Above him and around him, he heard the footsteps of the Danes, intent upon

their search ; and, confused by the strange suggestions surging through his mind, he cried, "This way ! this way !"

Karine led the stranger by the same road they had taken before, but instead of opening the door by which they had entered, she passed her hand along the wall until she found another. "You dare not venture into the garden," she whispered ; "the house is surrounded." The hinges of the heavy door creaked, as it swung open. "Descend twelve steps—you must count them—then turn to the left, and a subterranean passage will lead you to the Trollhätta, near the spot where you met me to-day. Shrubbery and a large stone conceal the opening. Make haste ! I hear them coming—the God of Sweden keep you—make haste !" she repeated anxiously.

"You know not what you ask, Karine," he answered passionately ; "what matters it to Sweden, or to myself, if they find me here and strike me dead at your feet?"

A gleam of light shone upon them from above.

"You are mad !" Karine gasped, endeavoring with both hands to force him through the door.

But her strength was nothing compared to his. He clasped her in his arms, and whispered,—

“Give me one kiss, Karine, and I will save myself and save Sweden. If you refuse, I surrender myself to the Danes.” The girl struggled to free herself, then cried out, “Björn! help me, Björn!” as the dog came running toward her, wagging his bushy tail. But he was too late. With a cry of anger and dismay, she broke away; the light shone round the corner, and at the head of the short flight of steps stood Gustav Rosen.

“Thank God, it is my betrothed!” she cried. Upon the fugitive, the effect of her words was startling. For a moment he staggered, as though he had received a blow; then he sprang toward her.

“You are betrothed to another, Karine Stenbock?”

The same harsh laugh which had so lately interrupted Gustav Rosen’s tale accompanied his words. At the sound of his voice, the latter sprang down the steps, and the light from his candle flashed full in Folkung’s face.

“Gustav —” exclaimed the youth, and his trembling hand lifted his sword to strike. But Karine caught his arm, and with lightning-like suddenness the fugitive’s hand lay upon his lips, cutting short his exclamation.

“You utter my name at the peril of your life, Gustav Rosen,” he said, in a tone so commanding that the youth shrank before his flaming eyes. “You have brought good tidings; the reaper must needs cut down the tares with his bloody sickle, before the harvest of the future may ripen. Farewell, Rose of the Trollhätta; I will keep my promise.”

Rosen looked up, astonished; the speaker had vanished. Only the creaking of the heavy iron-mounted door told whither he had gone. Other, louder steps now came hurrying through the gallery. Karine took the light from the hand of her lover, who, leaning against the wall, rested his weary blue eyes upon her face.

“It was well that you came, Gustav,” she said gratefully.

“Oh! Karine, had I not come — had I never come!” The Danish captain, followed by his men, appeared on the stairs.

“ You called, Herr Rosen ? ” he asked politely.

“ It was nothing ; Björn scented a wolf, prowling about the place ; ” and he pointed to the dog, who again showed displeasure at the sight of the soldiers.

“ We also have discovered nothing,” returned the officer, with a respectful inclination. “ I beg that you will intercede for me with the lady. It did not enter into my mind to entertain suspicion ; but duty, you know — ”

“ I should not have prevented you from fulfilling it in person,” Rosen interrupted him. “ Should a similar case again occur, I will not interfere, I give you my word.” With another bow, the captain left them. Karine walked in silence by her lover’s side, questioning his face with her eyes.

“ You are so strange this evening, Gustav,” she said, at last.

“ Strange ? ” he repeated, standing still ; “ not I, Karine, the world is strange. Give me your hand ; ” and he gazed at the slender hand until the tears filled his eyes.

“ Two days ago I saw King Christian hold out

his hand to his guests," he continued slowly ; "and it was as soft and white as yours. No, not the world, — the human heart is strange. It will not believe what the eyes see and the ears hear ; only what it desires, — that it believes !"





CHAPTER II.

ALL lay conquered and dead, from the Baltic to the dreary wastes of Norrbotten. As far as the eye could reach, from the summit of Kinnekulle, winter had spread its white pall over the land, and bound in icy fetters the rushing mountain torrents. In the deep places of the earth, the hidden streams murmur their plaintive song, all unheard. Winter reigns; and in Sweden the winter is long. Those now living may not see its end. All is conquered, save only the Trollhätta; he alone refuses to be bound. Unceasingly the wild waters plunge into the deep, as if to waken, with their loud note of warning, the sleeping earth. Unceasingly they tear down and fling aside the icy needles, that, like an enemy's spears, stand in their

way, endeavoring with their feeble strength to stay the torrent.

One human being in all the great land of Sweden resembles the Trollhätta. His name is Gustav Erikson ; from the bundle of fagots in his coat-of-arms, the people have called him Gustav "Vasa." His father was a Swedish senator ; and Sten Sture the Elder, who fell fighting against Christian II., was his great-uncle. Although scarcely thirty years old, he has met with strange and varied fortunes. As a child, King John of Denmark saw him in his uncle's house, at play with his companions, and assuming for himself the part of Cyrus. The Danish king watched the boy, and was seized with an uneasiness akin to that which befell Astyages at the sight of his unknown grandson. To prevent the youth from further imitating the career of Cyrus, he conceived the idea of carrying him to Denmark, and was only deterred by Sten Sture's persuasions. Later, Gustav Vasa was sent to the University of Upsala, the ancient royal city, until the civil war again broke forth, when he fought under the banner of Sten Sture against the traitor, Archbishop Trolle ; and in the glorious battle of Brännkyrka

he bore the nation's standard. That which King John failed by fair means to achieve was accomplished by the cunning of Christian, his successor, who, promising to negotiate at Stockholm with Sten Sture himself, demanded, as hostages for his safety, the surrender of six distinguished officers, among them Gustav Vasa. Trusting to the king's promise, the regent consented ; but no sooner had Christian received the hostages than he refused to come to Stockholm, and Gustav Erikson was a prisoner in Denmark.

He passed a year in the strong Castle of Kallö, in the north of Jutland. Daily he heard tidings of the vast preparations in progress throughout Denmark for Sweden's subjection, and no one in Jutland doubted their speedy realization. By reason of its feuds with the rebellious Archbishop Trolle, Sweden lay under the ban of the Pope ; and Christian's mercenaries drew lots over their wine for Swedish maidens and Swedish estates.

An ancient chronicler relates how "Gustav Erikson, by reason of such insolence, fell into fear and anger beyond measure ; so that he could taste neither meat nor drink, even had it been far

daintier than it was ; his sleep neither rested nor refreshed him, because he could think of naught, save how to find the means of escaping from his unrighteous imprisonment."

The means were found somehow. Disguised as a peasant, he fled, and in a few days reached the frontier of Jutland. In Flensburg, to avoid detection, he took service with some cattle-dealers, who were driving their oxen to Germany, and with them he reached Lübeck. By virtue of his eloquence, and by his personal influence, he obtained from the Senate of that city a promise of assistance, provided he succeeded in organizing a successful revolt against the usurper.

In May, 1520, Gustav Vasa landed at Kalmar, which, together with Stockholm, was the only Swedish town still offering resistance to the Danes. Stockholm, besieged by land and by sea, was inaccessible ; and in all manner of disguises he travelled through the adjacent provinces, — Smaland and Södermannland.

Then the capital fell, and all Sweden was in Christian's power. He came with changed demeanor, — not as the conqueror, but as the pro-

tector of the subjected nation ; and he invited the nobles of Sweden to his coronation at Stockholm.

In vain Gustav Vasa sought to deter his friends, among them his brother-in-law, Joachim Brahe, from obeying the invitation. Early in November of the same year, they went to Stockholm.

Gustav Erikson remained behind.

Soon winter lay upon Sweden, hiding the blood that had flowed into the Mälar. But the Trollhätta still thundered and roared ; and while that remained unsubdued, the winter had failed to conquer all. While Gustav Vasa still found a faithful Swedish heart, that, scorning danger, concealed him in some rocky hiding-place, so long Sweden remained unsubdued, and sleep fled the royal couch of the ancient Folkungs, upon which Christian of Denmark laid himself to rest.

It was indeed a howling, yelping crew that hunted the noble game from east to west, from north to south, throughout the length and breadth of the land. Now and then a bloodhound, more zealous than his mates, discovered his tracks in the snow, and, panting, followed his scent ; but as suddenly it was lost. Many a Danish captain

wrathfully tore his beard, when he learned how near he had been to the hiding-place of the fugitive ; and that he had only needed to stretch forth his hand and grasp the golden reward which King Christian had set upon his head ; yes, and how he had even held him, and unsuspectingly loosened his hold. To this day innumerable legends live in the memory of the Dalecarlian peasants of the dance Gustav Vasa led his pursuers, and of his hair-breadth escapes. Once he lay hidden in a wagon covered with straw, into which the Danish soldiers thrust their spears, dealing him a deep wound in the thigh. He bore his pain without a groan ; but the blood ran through the wagon and left red stains upon the snow ; and the faithful teamster cut a broad gash in his horse's leg, to divert suspicion. Another time Gustav Vasa disguised himself as the servant of a peasant, living near the confines of Norway. He was standing carelessly by the hearth-fire, when the Danish soldiers entered, and asked him after Gustav Vasa's hiding-place. At this threatening moment, the brave peasant-woman came to his assistance, dealt him a lusty blow with her broom, and drove him

from the house, chiding him as a lazy servant, who would not work, but rather stand by the fire and gossip.

In deep forest solitudes, among dreary rocks, he passed many a day; but whichever way he turned, he left traces of his presence. The iron hand of winter and of Christian of Denmark still lay upon Sweden. But a short day of sunshine will melt more than a cold night can freeze; and the Danes were no longer able to destroy in the hearts of the people the hopes awakened by Gustav Erikson. Whispered words flew from mouth to mouth, and eyes sparkling with hate followed the mercenaries. At night in lonely farmhouses, by the dim lamplight, many a rusty weapon was carefully tested, and restored to its ancient lustre. The seed of the massacre of Stockholm, strewn broadcast by that untiring sower, Gustav Erikson, began everywhere to ripen for the harvest. It was not yet springtime in Sweden, but a breath blew over the pines upon the hillsides, that proclaimed its coming.

Castle Torpa lay silent, buried in the snow. Far to the north stretched the endless surface of Lake

Wener's frozen waters. Besides its great lakes, Sweden, in the sixteenth century, possessed but scanty means of communication; and the few highways lay so deeply hidden under the snow that neither man nor beast could find them.

Even had the road to Torpa been free, it is not likely that many would have journeyed thither. The Danish ruler's interdict lay upon the household, and withheld any guest from entering its gates. No footprints in the snow led to or from the house of Gustav Stenbock, save those of the Danish soldiers, who, without warning, appeared from time to time, searched the house from the cellar to the roof, and each time left without finding what would have rewarded their pains.

Only one thing seemed changed. The master of the house and his blind wife had apparently grown weary of their futile resistance to foreign rule; they yielded to the inevitable; and, greatly to their surprise, each detachment of Danish mercenaries could tell of a friendlier reception than their predecessors. This seeming change of sentiment in one of Denmark's most bitter opponents did not pass unnoticed. Gustav Stenbock's stand-

ing was high in Sweden, and the support of his name would be of incalculable value to a throne obtained by force. The king, therefore, was careful to spread the news abroad ; and he soon learned, to his joy, that in the southern and middle provinces, the supposed traitor was bitterly denounced by his countrymen. He fancied that each curse bound Stenbock more closely to himself, and detached him more and more from the ranks of his former friends.

The chief means, however, of allaying Christian's suspicions were the presence of Gustav Rosen, and his relations to the house of Stenbock.

Gustav Rosen was the son of Brita Stenbock's brother, whose wife, a Danish lady of noble birth, had brought her husband large possessions in Denmark. He died early, and the young mother returned with her child to her own country. Before the boy had reached his tenth year, she also died, and he was sent to the house of Brita Stenbock, his aunt.

Gustav Rosen had loved his mother fondly ; and she lived in his memory as the embodiment of all that was fair and beautiful. In his

dreams he often felt the soft air of Zealand upon his face ; in his ears sounded his mother's gentle voice, as with wondrous old-time songs of Walde-mar Seyer's glory and the beautiful Dagmar, she sang him to sleep under the green beech-trees, whose leaves rustled and glittered in the sunlight. Then Gerda Rosen kissed him, and smiled with her beautiful lips, — so strangely, — and the boy awoke in tears.

A shudder shook his frame, when suddenly a rough blast of wind, rushing through the fir-trees by the Trollhätta, startled him out of his soft dreams. Cold and odorless, it blew across Lake Wener, — a greeting from the everlasting ice-fields. The Trollhätta, with its deafening noise and tumult, filled his soul with terror ; and away he sped from the wild, rude scenes to the shelter of home, where, instead of his mother's tender welcome, Brita Stenbock's cold face greeted him. She had never forgiven her brother for taking a Danish woman to his heart. Her voice assumed an added coldness when she addressed her nephew. Frightened and lonely, the boy then crept to his dim chamber in the great, gloomy house, and

sobbed himself to sleep. Then his friendly dreams came to comfort him ; and every warm and glowing dream-picture belonged to Denmark and the past.

One fair thing alone had nothing to do with Denmark, — the little golden-haired girl who oftentimes came to his room, sat down beside him, and with soft hands wiped away his childish tears.

“Do not weep, Gustav,” she pleaded ; “when I am grown up, I will go with you to Denmark.”

Then sleep was forgotten, and he would tell her what through the day he had kept locked within his heart. When, lost in memories, he would look at Karine, it seemed that the sweet child’s face grew larger and more beautiful, until he saw in it the sad and loving countenance of his dear mother ; and, smiling through his tears, the boy threw his arms around her, and hid his face upon her breast, as if she were indeed Gerda Rosen, until Karine herself grew sad, and tears came to her own eyes, and she would say, “Do not cry, Gustav ; I will be your wife, and I will then be your mother too, and we will go to Denmark together.”

In the morning, Brita Stenbock often found the

children thus sleeping side by side, and Karine was chided for her disobedience in comforting her stubborn Danish cousin. Stenbock himself was then called upon to punish Gustav for the misdemeanor of accepting comfort. But weightier business filled his thoughts in those days ; and he would pass the matter by, saying simply, —

“ Let the children alone, Brita, until their time comes.”

Possibly he did not regret the growing fondness between his daughter and the wealthy kinsman. The name of Stenbock ranked higher than the money value represented by its possessions, which, during a century of incessant warfare, had suffered materially. Stenbock gave himself little trouble with his nephew's education ; whatever was needful for a Swedish nobleman to know, the parish priest, whose patron was the lord of the castle, was able to impart. Although Gustav's temperament was gentle, and he differed greatly from other children of his age and rank, yet he required no spur to excel in all manner of bodily exercises. He mounted the wildest horses, and, emulating the men of the household, threw with ease the heaviest

spear. For Karine he climbed the steep rocks of the Trollhätta, where grew the rarest flowers, and, braving wind and weather, swam far out into Lake Wener, until he was lost to sight amid the distant waves; and only after anxious waiting would those upon the shore see his fair head shining among the foaming crests. A certain spiritual kinship existed between these two children, — a finer, more thoughtful cast of mind, reaching far beyond the manners and aspirations of their surroundings; only in one particular their natures diverged, and imperceptibly, with each year, grew wider apart.

As a flower develops according to the nature of the soil from whence it springs, so Karine grew up a true child of Sweden. Her eyes sparkled when she recalled its glorious past and its victories over Denmark, which she hated with childish vehemence. But Gustav Rosen laughingly shook his head and said "men were men, there as here, and should not hate and make war upon each other, but love and be friends." Then the child clinched her little hand and cried, "Never, never, could Swede and Dane be friends; they

were enemies from their birth." Yet when he told her the tale of the beautiful Dagmar, and of King Waldemar's grief at her death, Karine's eyes filled with tears, and she forgot that it was a Danish queen for whom she wept.

And so their childhood passed, while bitter strife and warfare engrossed the thoughts of their elders. As the years ripened in Karine a more glowing love of her country, the less she imagined that Gustav could be of another mind. To her he was as true a Swede as the young Gustav Vasa, of whom all the world was speaking; and she placed upon him the same high hopes that her father and mother put in the other. Gustav Rosen, on the other hand, saw in her more and more the image of his beautiful mother, who, after her husband's death, had fled from his country and kindred. He fancied that, like her, Karine was an exile in a strange land, and that he was destined to carry her back to her true home,—to fair, sunny Denmark.

Whatever happened, neither could picture a life without the other. Many a year had slipped by since Gustav Rosen first came to Torpa, and the

boy and girl had grown to manhood and womanhood. But, contrary to experience and precedent, their relations and their manner toward one another remained unchanged. Now, as then, they walked hand in hand; but no longer as brother and sister, — the playmates had become lovers. It was the old love clothed in new spring garments; and their own springtime scattered its blossoms, whose fragrance they breathed, unsuspecting whence it came.

When Gustav Rosen reached his eighteenth year, and with it his majority, it became necessary for him to go to Zealand, to take possession of his estates. It was the thought of this, their first parting, that tore asunder the magic veil which had bound their eyes. He felt unable to go, without the right to return.

Every one in Stenbock's house fancied he knew Gustav Rosen; but not one, not even Karine, understood him fully. One, perhaps, — Brita Stenbock, — and she withheld her consent when he formally sued for her daughter's hand. She was, indeed, obliged to yield when Stenbock insisted that "the children should have their will in this matter."

Then Brita endeavored to frustrate Rosen's journey to Denmark ; but here again she met with decided opposition, her husband deeming it not only desirable, but necessary, that they, who had never known what it was to be without the other, should experience a separation ; and their joy over the father's consent tempered the bitterness of parting.

According to the old Swedish custom, their betrothal was celebrated with solemn festivities. The noblest in the land were gathered at Castle Torpa ; and during the revel of the night many glowing toasts were heard, burning words of devotion to Sweden and hatred of Denmark. Rosen's face was flushed with joy and wine. In the morning he could not recall his words ; but he remembered that they had pressed his hand ; that Karine's eyes had beamed with happiness ; and that even Brita Stenbock's cold face had smiled upon him.

On the next day, the two walked hand in hand to the Trollhätta. Their steps grew slower as they approached the cataract. Behind them a servant led the young man's horse.

"It seems as if we were taking leave of our

youth," said the girl, struggling with her tears. He smiled.

"We were foolish children —"

"But happy children," she whispered.

Gustav Rosen looked about him. "All is as it was from the beginning of our lives. How many years have we sat here without understanding the beating of our own hearts! We thought we knew each other as we knew ourselves; and yet this secret lay within us, unsuspected. Shall it be the last, Karine?"

She nodded, with moist eyes. He clasped her in his arms and kissed her. "The Trollhätta is the third in our union, — our oldest friend. Here we will meet when I return; I will send you a message when the time comes."

He sprang upon his horse, and Karine held out her hand for the last time.

"Come when you will," she said, "I shall await you here. Come when your heart tells you that I can no longer endure your absence."

It so chanced that the same ship which carried Gustav Rosen from Götaborg to Copenhagen con-

veyed Gustav Erikson as hostage for the Danish king's safety from Stockholm to Denmark. He was older by ten years than Rosen; and his thoughtful face and marked features bore to the youth's dreamy countenance the same relation that a strong oak, proved by many tempests, bears to a slender sapling covered with careless blossoms. The voyage was delayed by contrary winds, which soon strengthened into a gale; and Rosen saw with amazement how in the moment of danger Erikson, like an experienced seaman, climbed into the rigging, more than once risking his own life to save the threatened ship. The powerful individuality of the young man inspired in Rosen a feeling of mingled attraction and repulsion; and he could scarcely endure the keen glance of the former when, in the discussion of the momentous questions which disturbed the minds of men in the North, it rested upon his face. He felt that the rushing waters of the Trollhätta would prove more sympathetic than Gustav Vasa, with his piercing eyes and his scornful laugh.

In one thing the two were equally mistaken. Gustav Vasa also expected to return in a few

weeks to Sweden, as soon as the negotiations in Stockholm should have led to a treaty of peace.

Rosen had little knowledge of public affairs. What had the ancient feud between Sweden and Denmark to do with his love? He learned somewhat of these matters when, upon their arrival in Denmark, his fellow-traveller was arrested and led away by soldiers amid the jeers of the populace. He was informed that the companion whom chance had thrown in his way was the most dangerous rebel in Sweden; and that it was foolish clemency on the king's part to carry him a prisoner to Jutland, instead of taking his life. Wherever Gustav Rosen went, everybody said the same, and everybody spoke of the imminent war that was to realize the dream of the treaty of Kalmar. For the first time in his life, Rosen found himself in the midst of a great political movement.

Here no one doubted his being a loyal Dane, just as on the other side they held him to be a true Swede. Here, moreover, he was a man of consequence. He suddenly saw himself taken at his true value,—as a rich and noble gentleman whose favor was worth the winning. Men hon-

ored him, and women no less. The blood rose to his face as the conviction seized him that Denmark was indeed his home.

But greatly as his fancy was pleased by the honor and consideration he enjoyed, he was not materially influenced by them. His heart was filled with thoughts of Karine ; her image lent to all his surroundings their pleasant charm. From Copenhagen he hastened to his estates in the interior of Zealand, where faithless servants had long played the master, and heaped up confusion toward the day of reckoning. Notwithstanding his youth and his poetic temperament, Gustav Rosen possessed a clear understanding of affairs, and the palpable dishonesty which met him on every side filled him with indignation. The appointed time passed quickly, and he was still obliged to remain to restore order and reform abuses. His chief delight was to beautify to the utmost the most lovely spot upon his estates. What Karine loved should greet her here. A merry, gushing brook, led by an abrupt declivity from its own bed into a deeper artificial channel, should remind her of the Falls of the Trollhätta. At last the day arrived

when upon his swiftest horse he flew back to Copenhagen.

Like a blow, the news met him here, that war had been declared against Sweden, and that no one was permitted to leave Denmark.

Gustav Rosen would go at any risk. He appealed to the most powerful men of his acquaintance, through whose influence he hoped to gain the desired permission, but in vain. They merely shrugged their shoulders, referring him to the king's command, and warning him that an attempt to carry out his purpose would certainly result in the loss of his possessions, if not of his life. And yet he made it. The Swedish coast lay so enticingly near in the golden evening light, he fancied he could hear the roaring of the Trollhätta, and see Karine's blue eyes gazing longingly across the water. By means of large promises he persuaded a fisherman to carry him over; but when he had almost reached land, he fell into the hands of a Danish cruiser, and was taken back to Copenhagen a prisoner, under the dangerous suspicion of being a Swedish spy. For weeks, ignorant even of his name, they held him confined

in a dismal tower, on meagre fare ; until, by a lucky accident, he was enabled to convey a petition into the king's hands. Before another day dawned his prison-doors were opened. He was dismissed with many apologies, and ordered to appear at the palace on the following day.

King Christian II. was a sovereign whose character united the most glaring inconsistencies. As a youth, although dissolute beyond his years, he was capable of so strong and passionate an affection for the beautiful Dyveke of Amsterdam, whom he met at Bergen during his regency of Norway, that he defied his father's threats, and endured the heaviest punishment, rather than renounce his love. His nature was fiercely despotic, and he pursued whatever opposed his will with cunning and with might to its utter destruction. He hated the nobles of Denmark no less than those of Sweden, because they refused to bend to his hand. More revengeful, more cruel and crafty, than the most abandoned wretches whose memory has been kept alive by their crimes, he was yet brave and fearless in the midst of danger, and of a penetrating intellect. The burghers clung to him because he

humbled their common foe, — the nobles, — wisely deeming it better to serve one master, however tyrannical, who sought their good-will, than the many who treated them with haughty contempt. When, moreover, in furtherance of his far-reaching schemes, he mingled with the people, no one displayed a more fascinating grace of manner, more simple, winning cordiality, than Christian II. No one possessed such absolute control over his features ; no one in a higher degree the dangerous faculty of hiding the evil thoughts that lurked beneath a calm exterior. His face wore the same kindly smile, whether he accepted from a burgher's hand a cup of wine wherein to drink his health, or whether he offered a poisoned draught to the victim of his displeasure.

Another tie bound his people still more closely to their sovereign : King Christian was a Dane in every fibre of his being, and resolved upon asserting Denmark's traditional claim to supremacy over Sweden. These islanders shared their king's resentment against the barriers that confined his power ; and a war of subjection against Sweden united all discordant elements under his command.

Soon after his accession to the throne, Christian married Isabella, sister to the German Emperor, Charles V.; and, notwithstanding the curses with which history has laden his memory, it might seem as if some promise of better things had lain hidden in his nature, from the fact that, through all the misery of his later years, his wife, while she lived, remained faithfully by his side. But it was the beautiful Dyveke, who, in defiance of his queen, occupied a wing of the royal palace, that ruled over his heart. His policy was controlled by the cunning mother of his mistress, the former innkeeper's wife of Bergen, and by his unscrupulous confessor, Slaghöök, who began his career as a barber's apprentice. These two incited him to the most cruel and insane measures against the nobles. The good star of his destiny, the only one who threw a ray of warm light into the gloom of Christian's heart, was that strange child of Holland, the lovely "Dove" of Amsterdam,—so merry, yet so sad; without envy or ambition; loving him for his own sake, and seeking, with wise and tender hands, to free him from the net of evil counsel in which her mother Sigbrit had entangled him.

Had a longer life been granted the gentle, far-seeing "Dove," history would presumably have had no massacre of Stockholm to record. But Dyveke died. Her death was shrouded in mystery; and the people, who loved her, accused the nobles of having poisoned her. Christian, goaded to madness by her death, lent a willing ear to these accusations. The heaviest suspicion rested upon Torben Oxe, a near relative of the governor of the palace at Copenhagen. He was thrown into prison, and upon the rack confessed that he had loved Dyveke before the king saw her. His execution was the beginning of a bloody persecution of the nobility. Unnumbered lives were sacrificed, and still Sigbrit was insatiable; until at last the people began to murmur at the extermination of their noblest families, and cunningly diverted the king's rage against Sweden and its lords. The massacre of Stockholm was planned years before its execution.

It was a curious circumstance that Christian II. and Gustav Erikson, men of widely different character and intentions, should have held the same views. The former planned the annihilation

of the Swedish nobility for the purpose of subjugating the country ; the latter, although abhorring the Danish monarch's ghastly crime, discerned that the longed-for independence of Sweden could be achieved only through the utter subjection of its magnates, whose jealousy opposed and thwarted every plan in furtherance of their country's greatness. Gustav Vasa realized that the slaughter of the nobles at Stockholm was not only the signal, but the sole condition, of Sweden's deliverance from Danish rule.

Christian II., since Dyveke's death, had grown gloomier, more merciless than ever. The light of his good star was quenched ; and his days were spent in solitary brooding, in devising secret, deadly plans.

It was thus Gustav Rosen's petition found him. One among King Christian's many statesmanlike qualities was his intimate acquaintance with the private concerns of his more prominent subjects ; and his eagle glance took immediate note of whatever might be turned to his own profit. He cordially invited the youth to tell him the story of his life, and smiled graciously when

the latter dwelt upon Karine Stenbock's beauty. Before Rosen had ended, he saw the dissonance that marred the harmony of the young man's nature, and its value to himself. He dismissed him with great friendliness, refusing, it is true, the coveted permission to return to Sweden, but holding out the hope that in a few weeks he himself would take him thither; and giving his royal word that if Brita Stenbock had used the intervening time to Rosen's disadvantage, he himself would see to it that justice was done him.

He then accompanied the young man to the door of his apartment, and, to the astonishment of the attending servants, gave him his hand at parting, and bade him a cordial farewell.

Gustav Rosen could not for nineteen years have grown up under Brita Stenbock's stern rule and remained insensible to the gracious kindness of Denmark's sovereign. Christian's dark deeds of revenge had been before his time; he scarcely knew of them; and their enthusiastic interest in the Swedish war had wellnigh caused the Danes to forget. Now and then, like a shadow, the thought

fell upon Rosen's heart that Karine was a Swede. But what signified an accidental difference of race when people loved each other? His birth indeed had made him a Swede, yet the boyish conviction that Denmark was his home had been strengthened. It should be her home as well, as it had been the home of his mother and of Queen Dagmar, whose images, rising out of the early days of his childhood, blended closely and tenderly in his memory.

The weeks lengthened into months, and only his thoughts were free to cross the narrow waters that parted him from Sweden ; nor could he even send a message to his betrothed, explaining his delay. At last Christian set his army in motion, and Rosen was ordered to await his commands. The wily king knew better than to ask Rosen to bear arms against the land of his fathers, but he was detained in the camp under various pretexts ; and in spite of the many evidences of goodwill shown him by the king, he was aware that sharp eyes watched his every movement, and that an attempt to reach Castle Torpa without permission would be as sure to fail as did his flight across the

Sund. Vainly struggling against his impatience, he followed the army. He witnessed the battle of Bogesund, where Sten Sture fell and Sweden became a prey to the invader, but he failed to grasp the fatal meaning of this disastrous day.

Toward evening the king found him, leaning against a tree, and gazing in mute despair upon the clear, moonlit landscape. Christian wore his full armor; by his own personal prowess he had helped to decide the issue of the battle. With a mocking smile, he touched the dreamer's shoulder and said, —

“If the Rose of the Trollhätta loved me, Gustav Rosen, I should saddle my horse this very moment, and go to her. My greetings to her, and to Brita Stenbock, her mother. If the lady objects to her son-in-law, bring her to Stockholm in November; I shall expect to see you in my capital then. Do you understand?”

Five minutes later, Gustav Rosen had mounted his horse. He rode through the night, until morning, and again until night, when he gave himself a few hours' rest, and, according to their agreement, sent a messenger to Karine, to announce

his coming. It was early in the afternoon when he rode past Castle Torpa, to keep his appointment by the Trollhätta. There rose the venerable elms, throwing their shadows upon the old house. He left them lying to the right, and hurried on. Nearer and nearer the cataract thundered its greeting. It seemed as if he had but yesterday parted from Karine, and that he must find her standing where he had left her.

Had any one mentioned to him the name of "Bogesund," or asked him who were the victors, he would scarcely have known how to answer. How well he remembered the path,—one more turn, one moment more, and Karine would be in his arms.

At last! Here was the spot. With flushed face he sprang from his horse and looked about him. Was he mistaken? Had his memory deceived him? Impossible! Each stone, each tree, was indelibly engraven on his heart. He hurried up the hillside, searching each hiding-place of their childish days; but no tell-tale golden hair shone from among the rocks. He called her name; but his voice was drowned in the noise of the cataract.

By degrees he came to his senses. The messenger had doubtless mistaken the hour of his arrival. She did not expect him so early. He ascended a hillock commanding a view of Castle Torpa, and waited; he waited a long time, until the twilight sank down upon the earth, and noisy flocks of crows clamored and croaked above the Trollhätta, disappearing like shadows in the darkness. Then, with a heavy heart, he rode back to Torpa.

A thousand fears crowded through his brain. Was Karine ill? Had Brita Stenbock perhaps — He spurred his horse until it sped over the ground like an arrow. In a few minutes he reached the gate, dismounted, and flew up the steps. A maid-servant met him.

“Where is Karine?” he asked, in breathless haste. “Is she ill?”

With a surprised look, she answered, “No; the young mistress is well, and expects you, Herr Rosen.”

He flung open a door; Karine rose hastily to meet him.

“Gustav, Gustav!” she exclaimed, “is it true that Sten Sture has fallen?” Her cheeks glowed;

her eyes were fixed in eager expectancy upon his face.

“Karine,” he stammered, taking her hand, “did you not know that I was coming? Since noon I have waited for you by the *Trollhätta*.”

As if awaking from a deep sleep, the girl looked up, and, sobbing, fell upon his neck. “Oh, Gustav, all is lost,” she moaned.

“Say, rather, all is gained,” he returned, “since we have each other again.” But, freeing herself, she looked at him, her eyes full of reproach.

“You came six hours ago; and only now you bring us news of the battle?”

“I waited for you over yonder,” he answered, with confusion; “did you not receive my message?”

Almost angrily she exclaimed, “Is this a time to think of child’s play? I did not suppose you would ride past *Torpa*,” she added more gently.

“You promised; had the skies fallen, Karine, I should have come,” he whispered. “Has our love become child’s play, Karine?”

She quickly turned. “My poor Gustav,” she said tenderly, “I forgot how you must have suffered at the Danish tyrant’s hands.”

Gustav Rosen had been "in captivity," and in the excitement and confusion of the battle had made his escape ; so every one supposed, — it was so probable. The young man himself was silent upon the matter. He was as one stunned. The stormy events of the day had rushed past his observation without his perceiving their import. Sometimes he tried to think, but his thoughts only brought him unspeakable weariness. In Karine's face, pale or flushed by turns, in the expression of her eyes, he read her country's fate. She had grown excited, restless, as never before. Two souls seemed to dwell within her, looking out upon the world with deep, prophetic eyes : the one, with shining, tender glances, unfathomable as the summer sky, loved Gustav Rosen ; the other, gazing past her lover's face, fixed her troubled eyes upon the distant future. Karine Stenbock's first question was not for her father's safety, — she asked if Sten Sture had fallen.

Another misfortune marked the day that saw Sweden's downfall, — unnoticed in the stormy course of public events, which take no note of private griefs. The messenger who brought to Torpa

the news of Gustav Rosen's arrival brought also the first tidings of the issue of the battle. Brita Stenbock rushed wildly from the house and wandered away in the direction of Bogesund. They found her the next day, lying fainting upon the ground, fourteen miles from Torpa, — her clothing torn, and drenched with the rain that had fallen during the night. For weeks she hovered between life and death, and when at last she awoke to consciousness, Brita Stenbock was stone-blind.

But what are a woman's eyes, compared to Sweden's fate? Karine wept bitter tears by her mother's bedside, but a message from Stockholm speedily made her forget her own sorrows. Her father took part in the defence of the capital; and almost daily some secret word reached Torpa for his wife, whose place Karine, scarcely eighteen, was now obliged to fill. The force of circumstances carried the young girl far beyond her years; many single threads of the resistance that, here and there, in the mountains and by the sea, still met the conqueror, were united in her hands. Thus her mother, of necessity often left to herself, would

have passed many lonely hours, had there not been another to attend to her wishes.

Gustav Rosen had never loved his aunt ; but the sight of her sorrow and helplessness filled him with compassion. Brita Stenbock was a hard woman ; she had no sigh for her lost sight, nor thanks for the young man who sat unwearyingly by her bedside, submitted to her capricious moods, and received in silence her taunts and reproaches when he failed to give her the information she desired concerning matters in Stockholm. Gustav Rosen felt more painfully the loss of her sight than that of Sweden's liberty. To him she was no longer the stern, unsmiling kinswoman whose will was the law of her household, — she was only Karine's mother. But if his unceasing care and devotion earned small thanks from her, Karine's love consoled him. Many a glance of gratitude from her blue eyes met his, and, taking his hand, she would say, "How good you are, Gustav !"

But when messengers arrived from the seat of war, then Karine's eyes were blind as her mother's to all besides. She neither saw her lover nor heard his pleading words. Another influence held

her captive, like the ancient bard of whom the legend runs, who stood by the brink of the Trollhätta, and, compelled by the terrible fascination of the thundering stream, leaped into its waters.

Often in her childhood had she stood by the Trollhätta and gazed at the spot where it was all said to have happened, and she could not understand it.

Now she and Rosen are sitting together as of old. He jestingly tells her that she makes him think of the ancient bard, and that the fate of Sweden is her Trollhätta, seeking to take her from him. Then he laughs, and tells her when that comes he will be able to keep her from the devouring flood.

“What is it, Karine?” he asked suddenly. The girl had thrown her arms about his neck and rested her head on his breast.

She looked up tenderly, and kissed him.

“My poor Gustav, do not grow weary,” she said softly. “If you should grow weary and the stream should catch me, it would be too late to save me —”

She shuddered, and again threw herself on his breast.

“Never leave your Karine,” she whispered. “I love you so much — so much —”

Then Stockholm fell. Its brave defenders were overwhelmed by fearful odds. They fled into the interior and dispersed. Gustav Stenbock returned to Torpa. Sweden was lost, and it only remained for each individual to save his own life, if possible.

Dark days lay upon Sweden, although the summer and autumn of 1520 were of rare, unclouded beauty. The new king seemed indeed to regard all his subjects with the same paternal affection and solicitude; no longer to resent their resistance, and to have forgotten and forgiven all past offences. In this conciliatory tone he issued his invitations to the lords, whether or not they had borne arms against him, to meet him at Stockholm, where his coronation was to take place on the first day of November.

To Gustav Rosen alone the dark days were happy ones. It seemed as if Karine had awakened from a long stupor to health and happiness. As in the olden time, she wandered with him over the hills and through the forests. The troubled dream had vanished from her eyes, and it seemed

as if her thoughts had never harbored aught beyond the old, renewed, transfigured child-love. Nothing was left to Gustav Stenbock in these evil times, save to take comfort in his children's happiness. Only Brita remained cold as before toward Rosen, using all her skill to thwart her husband's wishes, by continually devising new pretexts for postponing her daughter's marriage. But at last even she could find no plausible reason for further delay, and the marriage was fixed for the coming December. Then Gustav Stenbock was invited, and Gustav Rosen commanded, to appear at the king's coronation.

Karine's tears flowed more abundantly at this parting than at the first. The separation was to be short, but so they had once before believed. At all events, it was inevitable, Stenbock himself urging upon his nephew the necessity of going. For himself, he pleaded an injury to his knee as an excuse for avoiding so fatiguing a journey. He, as little as the other invited guests, Gustav Erikson excepted, dreamed of any danger; but he deemed it contemptible to appear at the court of a conqueror against whom he had so recently borne arms.

The very day upon which Gustav Folkung saved Karine from the wild Trollhätta waters, he had changed his mind. All who were bidden had gone ; and he feared, chiefly for his children's sake, needlessly to arouse the tyrant's anger. Without telling his wife, of whose opposition he was certain, he set out upon the road to Stockholm.

Near Lake Wetter he met Gustav Rosen, returning thence.

Excited, deeply shocked by the fearful deed he had witnessed, Rosen rode back to Torpa by Stenbock's side. There, carried away by the horror of it, he spoke words that made it seem as if he too felt the shame, the bitter wrong, done to Sweden. An inner voice, perhaps, told him that a generous heart must break away altogether from its childish dreams and aspirations, should Denmark applaud this monstrous treachery against hundreds of the noblest of another race. On that night, perhaps, the youth came nearer than ever to forgetting Gerda Rosen, Zealand's beech-woods, and the sunny dreams of his childhood, and of understanding the other soul of Karine Stenbock.



CHAPTER III.

AND now all lay dead, from the Baltic to the ice-fields of the North, beneath a sunless sky, joyless, colorless, hopeless. Brita Stenbock was fortunate, — she could not see the pale, sad light of those gloomy days. But she heard all the more sharply, and her keen ears took note of whatever passed around her.

Since that memorable night, Gustav Rosen never again forgot his mother nor Denmark. For a moment he had stood as upon a swaying rock, from whence a breath of air might cast him upon this side or that. The storm that burst upon Castle Torpa had stunned him; the massacre of Stockholm was wiped from his memory.

He neither thought nor spoke of it; but his heart seemed heavy and cold since the night when

he had crossed the threshold of Karine's room. A great, silent pain oppressed him. He accused her of no disloyalty to himself; but it filled him with grief that she should commit an act which might throw a breath of suspicion upon her fair fame. He realized that there was a something, a formless shadow, which threatened to rise up between them and divide their hearts.

Karine, in her unsuspecting innocence, failed to understand his feeling. What she had done was so unavoidable that it could not have been otherwise. Now that no promise bound her to silence, she freely told him all the details of the evening's events. Gustav Folkung was not the first fugitive who had found shelter in Castle Torpa. But upon former occasions the persecuted wanderers had applied to the lord of the castle himself; and for the first time Karine was placed under the necessity of acting upon her own responsibility. Gustav Rosen listened in silence as she related how the stranger's commanding manner had impressed her; how anxious she had felt when he attempted to enter her room, since she had pledged her word not to betray Folkung's pres-

ence ; and how at last, daring all, she had hurried through the crowd of Danish soldiers to reach the rear door.

“I feared that in your surprise you might betray him before I could warn you. Afterwards, we heard you calling, ‘This way, this way!’ in the gallery. Why did you call them?”

With touching innocence, her eyes questioned his. A deep flush rose to his forehead as he stammered, —

“Forgive me, Karine ; I was unnerved with what I had seen at Stockholm, and I thought — I meant — to mislead the Danes.”

She shook her head. “It seems that you, whom we call the stronger sex, now and then lose your wits entirely, and commit the most foolish blunders. Instead of misleading the Danes, your call brought them upon us. One minute more, and it had been too late. But why did you come through the passage yourself?”

A sudden light gleamed in the young man’s eyes. “After what I had seen in your room —” He checked himself, and turned away.

“You should have known that some one had

been concealed there," she returned, "and you should have been doubly careful; your imprudence might have exposed me to the most dangerous suspicions."

Gustav Rosen's eyes met hers; they expressed the same gentle reproach he had felt in her words. But when she saw he was pained, the old, trusting love beamed upon him; and, deeply moved, he fell upon his knees and stammered:—

"Forgive me, Karine; forgive me!"

She scarcely knew what to forgive. A wide difference lay between the suspicion of which she spoke and that other suspicion for which his tears, falling upon her hand, craved pardon. She only said again,—

"You are so strange, Gustav."

She might rather have said, Jealousy is so strange! Jealousy, the double-headed monster, which fastens upon its unhappy prey like a fever, blinding his eyes, clouding his brain, shaking his bones; who disturbs his sleep with the quivering of a leaf, and makes him afraid of a shadow; whom in lucid moments he knows as his deadliest foe; with whom he wrestles and struggles;

whom he conquers again and again, only to yield anew.

Gustav Folkung's name never passed Rosen's lips ; but it was burned in his heart, as if with red-hot irons.

The month of December, and the day appointed for the wedding, had long since come and gone. Brita Stenbock said this was no time for merry-making, and the winter was indeed a dreary one at Castle Torpa. No human footprints in the snow betokened intercourse with the outside world. The only living creatures near and far were the rooks that flew cawing about the great lonely building. The severe, long-enduring cold tamed even them, and they gathered in flocks around the kitchen door, tearing the food from the servants' hands ; or they waited for hours near the window, from whence Karine, pitying their condition, fed them, together with her doves. Among them were little graceful creatures, who in the young girl's presence lost their shyness, perching fearlessly upon her shoulder, and pecking the grains of wheat from her hand.

Through them, doubtless, she received tidings of

the world beyond Torpa ; for she knew all that was passing, although no human foot crossed her father's threshold. She knew of the rising among the Dalecarles, the "valley-men," into whose wild country Gustav Vasa had fled. She was intimately acquainted with the desperate expedients of the unhappy men who, having escaped the massacre of Stockholm, were hunted through the kingdom by Christian's soldiers, and dragged to the scaffold. At Jönköping, a nobleman of the clan of the Ribblings, together with his two sons, eight and ten years old, was beheaded in the king's presence. When the headsman, moved by the artless prattle of the children, refused to do his work, he was replaced by another less tender of heart.

All these things were known at Torpa ; but Brita Stenbock moved no muscle of her face ; no word of anger escaped her lips. It was clear that the house of Stenbock had made its peace with the King of Sweden ; and this was a wise course. Among the few noble families still left in Sweden, it ranked highest, and might eventually, by the favor of the king, lay claim to the most influential position in the state, next to himself. Whispered

maledictions and words of scorn rewarded this treason to the cause of their country; and it was rumored that after King Christian's return to Denmark, Stenbock would be made regent of Sweden. The few who refused to believe these reports were silenced, for the news went abroad that the king would, by Stenbock's invitation, visit Torpa on his way to Denmark, and honor by his presence the marriage of Karine Stenbock and Gustav Rosen.

The report was true. Brita Stenbock herself had requested her nephew to ask this favor of the king, and never had he more cheerfully obeyed his aunt's bidding.

The April winds carried the first warm breath from the south, when Gustav Rosen left Torpa and rode toward Stockholm. Then he sent word that the king had consented, and would reach Torpa on the first of May. He himself could not return sooner, since it was Christian's wish that he should remain in Stockholm until that time, and accompany him on the journey.

April is not a spring month in Sweden. The snow still lay around Torpa, and the rooks still fluttered expectantly about the windows, sat upon

Karine's shoulder, and whispered into her ear the mysterious tidings they had gathered abroad.

Sometimes they were startled by sudden noises in the old house, that had long been so silent. Now the sound of labor was heard all day long, and the busy hands were not allowed to rest until all should be in readiness for the reception of the honored guest. The apartments assigned to the king and his retinue were in the left wing of the castle. In a large hall of the same wing, an altar was erected; and the whole house, in accordance with Northern usage, was hung with evergreen and mistletoe.

From morning until night, the noise and bustle never ceased. Brita Stenbock's blind eyes saw and guided all, and Karine's glistened strangely as she carried out her mother's orders. Clearly, this look had little to do with the altar they were building in the great hall. It was the look which Gustav Rosen could not understand.

The night brought silence. The workmen slept in quarters prepared for them in the outbuildings. As soon as they left the house, Stenbock himself closed the portal, and drew the heavy oaken bolt.

Before daybreak no one entered, and from outside no sound was heard in the great building. But within there were soft footsteps, gently falling, as if Karine's rooks had found an entrance, and were fluttering, under cover of darkness, upon the narrow staircases, and through the dim passages.





CHAPTER IV.

EARLY on the morning of the first of May, a brilliant procession crossed the Wetter Lake. Many an eye that gazed upon the bright pageant may have looked the thoughts which the coward lips dared not express, as the train reached the shore and proceeded westward by the broad road, upon which the peasants for weeks past had spent days and nights of labor. In Dalecarlia, these lips would scarcely have restrained their curses; and King Christian II., with all his stately retinue, had not ridden so calmly past the stalwart Sons of the Valley. But here there was little to fear. They called this the first of May; but winter still lay upon Sweden, and held it in its icy grasp.

With gloomy looks Christian rode under the pale May sun, whose chilly beams mocked the name which men had given this month.

The horse that bore the king was black ; while the crimson saddle-cloth flamed like blood upon his dark flanks. With knitted brow the monarch surveyed the groups by the wayside. He was sterner than ever since that fateful night in Stockholm, and deep furrows seamed his brow.

The only one, perhaps, who took no note of these things was Gustav Rosen. To him the frosty sunbeams seemed warm and genial ; and to him it was the breath of spring that blew across the dreary landscape. He saw only respectful curiosity in the glances with which the peasants met the approaching procession. By the king's command, Rosen rode at his side ; now and then the former spoke a few words, which the young man, lost in his smiling dreams, scarcely heard ; nor did the king wait for an answer, but followed, as before, the current of his own thoughts. The house which he was about to visit was of no small significance for his plans. In Stenbock's person the entire Swedish nobility, fugitives since the

coronation at Stockholm, rendered him homage ; and in addition, he had won Gustav Rosen for his cause.

They crossed the battle-field of Falköping, and, rising in his stirrups, the king glanced about him.

“ We have done better than Dame Semiramis, our grandmother,” he suddenly said in a sharp voice. “ The Lady Margaret was not learned in agriculture, and forgot that in reclaiming the wild soil, it is necessary to burn out the stumps and to fertilize the land with blood. Had she done so in her day, the fair daughters of this land would doubtless have regarded us with friendlier eyes. What think you, Rosen,—will the Rose of the Trollhätta, for the sake of the office we have undertaken, overlook our years, and find us to her liking? ” A short, harsh laugh followed the question, and his eyes swiftly scanned the puzzled face of his companion. Before the latter had found an answer, he continued: “ There lie the bones, Rosen, which my brave forefathers and yours have heaped together ; perhaps at this very moment my horse’s hoof is crushing the skull of an ancestor of yours, who was fool enough to lose his life for such a

thing as Sweden. We are wiser, Rosen; we bring about no Union of Kalmar, that treads flesh and blood in the dust, — no, but another union, from which new life shall spring. Let us make haste; it is growing late, and the Rose of the Trollhätta awaits us.”

His Majesty of Sweden, Norway, and Denmark was in a mirthful mood that day, as no one had seen him since his coronation at Stockholm. Those near him exchanged furtive glances of surprise. His laughter boded no good. Then they put spurs to their horses, and, like the Wild Huntsmen, dashed after the king's black stallion over the field of Falköping.

It was already twilight when the royal train arrived at its destination, and Castle Torpa was illuminated with hundreds of lamps and torches. The master of the house, bareheaded, welcomed his guest at the entrance. Behind a curtain in one of the rooms of the first floor stood Karine, and with the eyes that Gustav Rosen feared, she measured the king's retinue. Scarcely seeing her lover's face, she glanced aside to the numerous horsemen already filling the court; to the numbers thronging

after them, their halberds gleaming in the fitful torchlight. Karine's lips counted, and her face grew pale. She staggered for a moment, clutched the curtain that concealed her, and then silently hurried away.

Below, Gustav Rosen held the king's stirrup while he dismounted. Christian glanced at the vast old building, now light as day, and condescendingly offered his hand to his host. For a second, Stenbock, like his daughter, seemed overcome by a sudden faintness. He gazed at the royal hand without touching it, then raised his own to wipe away the cold drops that had gathered upon his forehead. Christian observed the gesture, and frowned.

"You invited me last autumn, Stenbock, to visit you; I received your message," he said, the irony in his voice intelligible to Stenbock alone. "You did not deign to accept our invitation to Stockholm; but we know that you were excused. As you see, we bear you no grudge, but come to you to-day as your guest, and only await your welcome."

Something in his words seemed to restore Sten-

bock's strength. He grasped the proffered hand, and in a firm voice bade the king welcome.

Together they ascended the stairs carpeted with soft rugs. Seeing his people crowding after him, the king turned.

"The King of Sweden is safe in Gustav Stenbock's house," he said, "and needs no guard. Select twelve knights to accompany us, Captain Torben; the rest may remain below. Come, Stenbock, we are impatient to see the Rose we are to place in Rosen's hand to-morrow;" and again Christian laughed.

At his first words Stenbock had grown whiter than the wall against which he leaned; but he quickly recovered himself, and conducted his guests to the halls of the left wing, where Brita Stenbock awaited them. She stood erect and stately in the middle of the first room.

"Do I stand before King Christian of Sweden?" she asked in a firm voice.

Stenbock assented, and for the first time Christian's rigid features betrayed surprise. He knew that he was in the presence of Denmark's most embittered enemy, — a woman of whom he be-

lieved that she would more willingly bow her head to the executioner's sword than to him. A gleam of real pleasure quivered over his dark face as Brita Stenbock continued, —

“You are welcome, King Christian! I thank you in the name of my country; for I trust that your sojourn in our house will be for Sweden's good.” Brita Stenbock neither hesitated nor turned pale as she spoke. Her gray head proudly raised, her sightless eyes looking straight before her, she stood waiting for the hand of the king, who in evident confusion took hers and led her to the head of the long table in the adjoining banqueting-hall. She seated herself by his side, and fulfilled her duties as hostess as though her eyes were overlooking all. It was evident, from the precision with which the blind woman maintained the dignity of her house, that she must be of extraordinary character. Now King Christian raised his glass and touched that of his hostess, held with an unwavering hand.

“To the welfare of this house!” he said, and drank.

“To the welfare of Sweden!” responded Brita

Stenbock, calmly emptying her glass and leaning back in her chair. The lights from the walls were reflected in the massive silver upon the table, and sparkled in the red wine; a delicious odor of savory meats filled the hall. The king's look bespoke contentment, although his eyes roved searchingly about the room. By degrees a certain impatience became visible, and, turning to his hostess, he asked, —

“And the queen of the festivities, to which we were bidden, where is she? Methinks I see a pair of expectant eyes that ask the same question, and with greater right than I.”

He waved his hand in the direction of Gustav Rosen, who sat mute in the midst of the guests, blind and deaf to his surroundings. As soon as he was able to leave the king, he had gone to seek his betrothed; but he failed to find her. Those he asked had just seen her, yet no one knew where she was. Lost in thought, Rosen saw nothing of the king's gesture. But at the same moment he sprang to his feet, radiant with joy, for she of whom he was thinking appeared on the threshold.

Karine was still pale ; but in the ruddy light of the torches her pallor enhanced her beauty. She wore a heavy white trailing dress, confined at the waist by a blue girdle, — blue and white being the Swedish colors. Her hair lay in sunny luxuriance upon her shoulders, and she was indescribably lovely as, with queenly bearing, she stepped into the full light of the room. All eyes turned toward her ; every hand that had lifted a glass sank down.

Only two, however, rose to their feet, — Gustav Rosen and King Christian.

“Truly, Rose of the Trollhätta !” the latter exclaimed, approaching her, “I need not hear your name, to know who you are. You are guilty of high treason for every moment you deprive us of your presence ; and as a punishment we will for this evening part you from your betrothed. The Queen of Sweden is not in the place which belongs to her, — at my right hand ; and after her, you have the first claim to it. And,” turning to the guests, “we ask you all to follow our example, and greet the queen of the evening.”

Karine met her lover’s eyes with a hasty wel-

coming glance, then with proud dignity took her place by the side of Christian, who, standing, emptied his glass in her honor. The courtiers bowed deeply before the daughter of their host. Something in the king's glance, as it rested upon her face, caused them to show her deeper reverence than had she been the queen herself in her palace at Copenhagen. Gustav Rosen scarcely trusted his eyes. Was this Karine, who, for her country's tyrant, could forget her love? Her eyes — with the look he feared — hung upon every movement of King Christian. Yet she smiled upon him, and he drank the wine she poured into his glass.

“She is lovelier than the Dove of Amsterdam,” the courtiers furtively whispered to each other. “She will bring good fortune to Sweden.”

Had Karine Stenbock discerned but one road leading to Sweden's salvation, — the road which Esther in the olden time took to the throne of the Persian king? Truly, you are a strong woman, Karine, and posterity will admire, perhaps bless you; but your love was false, your heart worthless. Pause, Karine, before it is too late! You still

tremble, and your eyes, as if overcome by a sudden dread, still seek your father's glance. Is it he who has sold you for Sweden's deliverance, — whose unwavering eye gives his daughter courage to tread the path that leads to treason against Gustav Rosen?

It was a merry night, such as Torpa had not witnessed for many years. King Christian was ordinarily of most temperate habits; since the massacre of Stockholm he drank no wine that had not first been tasted by another. But by Karine's side his suspicions vanished, and he emptied his glass as often as her white hands filled it. His eyes hung upon her face; the wine overmastered his tongue, and he no longer whispered, but spoke loud enough for Brita Stenbock to hear every word he addressed to her daughter. But, like her husband, she sat immovable upon her richly carved chair. Gustav Rosen filled his glass frequently from the silver flagon before him. He sought to escape from his thoughts, and dull his brain. Midnight was past. The king evidently wished to withdraw, yet hesitated. He opened his lips, and closed them again.

“Lovely Karine,” he whispered at last, “it is time for us to part; but before the day breaks I must speak with you again. Will you await me? If you refuse, I will have my horse saddled now, immediately, and another may lead you to the altar — if I permit it. Do not answer. Drink to me if you consent.”

This time the king had spoken so low that no one but Karine heard him. She lifted her glass, but her hand trembled, and the red wine ran upon the table. Sorely troubled, her eyes sought her father’s.

“Courage,” said Stenbock’s unflinching glance, “courage!” and Karine touched the king’s glass with her own, and drank.

“See to it,” he whispered, “to have my people so lodged that they will not disturb us. I have much to say to you, Karine — ”

The girl’s strength was spent. Wearily her head sank back against her chair. The king rose.

“Our queen is tired,” he said in a loud voice, once more filling his glass. “Let us drink to her pleasant dreams.”

Once more the glasses rang, and the courtiers bowed before the new sun that had so unexpectedly risen before their eyes at midnight. Then they prepared to follow the king; but he restrained them with a motion of his hand.

“We require no guard, Captain Torben, and wish to rest undisturbed. Our hospitable host has no doubt provided lodgings, where you can recover from the effects of his excellent wines. We thank you, Stenbock. Rosen will permit us the privilege of saluting our hostess, according to the old custom.” At these words he threw his arm around Karine’s shoulder, and kissed her forehead. “In an hour,” he whispered.

Esther’s battle was won. “In an hour,” she calmly repeated.





CHAPTER V.

ALL is silent in Castle Torpa. Night lies upon Sweden ; the shadows of clouds chase one another in the moonlight over the battle-fields of Falköping and Bogesund, and the waves of the Mälar splash against the deserted palace-steps at Stockholm, washing away the last blood-stains from the granite masonry. They carry westward the new spring's greeting ; the waters of Hjelmars hear it, and speed it farther over the boundless surface of Lake Wener. Then the Trollhätta thunders it forth : The spring is at hand.

Karine's rooks have heard the tidings, and are abroad this moonlit May night. Perhaps they fear the glittering halberds, that crowd the court and garden of Torpa, and they therefore assemble

by the lonely brink of the Trollhätta. One day of sunshine has not conquered the snow, which still covers the rocky hillside ; and upon it the black figures are distinctly visible. The night is so clear, one might count the silent figures, as they approach by the Göta-Elf, — there are just forty of them ; and when they have crossed the river, they climb the steep shore, and suddenly disappear, one by one, in the earth, where they have no doubt built their nests ; and as if scattered by the wind, they have vanished from the snow-covered moonlit valley.

Only the steady footfall of the guards, pacing to and fro, disturbs the silence that rests upon Torpa. Within the vast building, the lamps and torches have been extinguished. On the second floor, Captain Torben and his companions rest upon soft couches. Stenbock's wine has thrown them into a deep sleep, and none of them hear the roaring of the Trollhätta, that thunders through the night.

In a lofty, dimly lighted room, Christian II. reclines in a curiously carved armchair. For a moment he throws himself upon the silken couch, above which glitters a golden crown ; but excite-

ment makes him restless. With fixed eyes he gazes upon the crimson curtains, which, in the uncertain light of the lamp, fall like streams of blood from the ceiling to the floor. Softly they are stirred by the air from the open window, and it seems to him as if the blood flowed slowly down the wall. Since last autumn the monarch of the kingdoms of the North has grown timorous and superstitious. The red color makes him shudder : he starts from his seat, and stares at the waving curtains.

No ; at this moment he is not thinking of the bloody heads that, last November, rolled at his feet. A stronger fascination has banished his fear. His fancy sees another head, whose golden hair falls upon snowy shoulders.

You have won, Esther. By to-morrow morning you will have vanquished the savage conqueror of your country ; and Sweden's deliverance, after which your eyes have yearned so long in vain, rests in your white hand.

Karine stands in her chamber, her hand pressed upon her heart. Her face is as pale as when she sat at table by Christian's side. But she no

longer trembles, and she too watches anxiously in the death-like silence. Now her listening ear catches the sound of a soft footfall approaching, not by the passage-way, but through the adjoining room, and pausing at the door, through which, last year, Gustav Folkung looked unseen upon Brita Stenbock's face. An almost inaudible tapping, and hastily, noiselessly, Karine draws the bolt, and opens the door. In a moment Gustav Rosen's arms are holding her close, and he whispers, —

“You would have driven me mad, Karine, — but for this. After a month of restless days and nights, I return, only to see you at a distance — without a look, without a greeting —” His voice rose with emotion ; the girl freed herself from his arms, and anxiously covered his lips with her hand.

“Hush !” she whispered, her lips close to his ear, and her eyes fastened upon the opposite door. “In a few moments King Christian will enter through that door. I am afraid of him, and therefore I called you. You are my best protector, Gustav ; and you will wait in the next room. It was all to be different, and my mother bade me tell you nothing. But now the court and

garden are filled with armed men, and everything is changed. I could not have undertaken it if I had not known that you would be with me."

The young man stared, speechless ; he failed to understand her meaning. More closely her lips were pressed to his ear ; the few hasty words she whispered made him stagger with horror.

"Here — " he stammered breathlessly, "where I have brought him — where my honor is pledged — never !" he stammered, breathless.

Karine's blue eyes rested with a troubled light upon his face.

"Gustav," she asked with faltering lips, "are you not a Swede? Only to a Swede can I give my hand."

Anxiously, with despair in his face, he gazed at her. "The time presses ; the king may at any moment leave his room," she continued hurriedly. "The gleam of his light, as he comes through the gallery, will be the signal for Gustav Folkung —"

She paused to listen. Her eyes, turned away from Rosen's face, did not see the frenzied light that suddenly flickered over his disturbed features. One word only was needed to drive him to utter

madness, and Karine had uttered it, — the name which the two-headed monster in his heart clutched at, and held up in triumph.

“Gustav Folkung,” and he laughed aloud. “Is he coming to take you away? — Gustav Folkung.”

Unconsciously he thrust aside Karine, who clung to him, and sprang to the door, which he flung open.

The sound of his voice, the resonant tread of his hurrying feet, seemed to have wakened an echo in the furthestmost end of the passage leading to the steps in the rear of the house. A murmur of voices is heard from below; objects are moving confusedly; some one cries, “Treason!” another exclaims, “Back!” but a firmer voice commands, “Forward!” These are Karine’s rooks. They crept into the earth; and out of the earth they rise again. None will give the other precedence; crowding closely together, they rush forward through the narrow gallery.

One second more, and the man in flowing garments, who is coming nearer, shading his light with his hand, will find his retreat cut off. King

Christian's fevered senses perceived nothing. He advanced.

Then Gustav Rosen, like a madman, springs toward the king, and clutches his arm.

"Save yourself!" he cries, and forces him back toward his apartment. "You are betrayed! Gustav Vasa has entered the castle by an underground passage!"

These are not rooks that throng the corridors; they are Dalecarles, of herculean build, each of whom might have carried the monarch of the Northern kingdoms, like a little child, upon his hands. Gustav Stenbock is their leader; and headlong they rush onward. The plan has miscarried. Silence is now no longer necessary, but haste.

"Where is the tyrant?"

They have met Karine, hurrying after her lover, and she shows them the way. In her eyes the soft beams are quenched; her lips quiver with scorn and anger; she calls, "He has fled to his room; Gustav Rosen has betrayed us!"

A wild curse leaps from the lips of the foremost; and, sword in hand, Gustav Folkung hastens away in the direction indicated.

The fugitives are still in the corridor. The king's light went out, and they have missed the door. Their life, Sweden's fate, hangs upon a second of time.

But Gustav Rosen knows even in the dark every footbreadth in Castle Torpa. His groping fingers have found the door; and, drawing the king into the room, he pushes the bolt, just as Folkung's hand clutches the brass knob on the outside.

But the door resists, and in answer, they hear Gustav Rosen's voice calling out of the window:

"Help! Help! They will murder the king!"

With one rude blow the stillness of the night has vanished. A hundred calls are heard from every side. With clanking arms the soldiers mount the broad staircase. Overhead, Captain Torben and his companions leap from their beds; half dressed, they grasp their swords and stagger downstairs. They meet Stenbock and his men, endeavoring to enter the king's apartment through the banquet-hall. The spears with which the Dalecarles are hunting the royal bear in his den, strike with deadly force the naked breasts of the Danes. Still heavy with sleep, Knut Torben totters toward

the gray-haired, Berserk form of the lord of the castle, and cries, —

“We were sleeping under your roof, Gustav Stenbock. Is this Swedish hospitality?”

“Stockholm’s hospitality, Knut Torben. We learned it from you,” he thunders, as his sword smites the captain’s temple; who with a cry sinks to the ground beside the very chair upon which, a few hours since, he sat, drinking to the daughter of the man who has crushed his careless skull. Around the table the combat rages. Silver vessels fly through the air; but the dying Danes have for a moment forced the valley-men away from their king’s door, and Rosen’s call brings help from all quarters. The torches which the soldiers have lighted make the halls and passages light as day.

“Back! We are lost!” shouts Stenbock. The Dalecarles are but forty, to a hundred Danes. It would be madness longer to pursue their object; and now they are in danger of seeing their retreat cut off. Stenbock calls to Folkung, who turns to Karine, standing like one stunned, and gazing at the approaching Danes.

“We will meet again, Christian,” he mutters between his teeth. Then, with a strength surpassing even that of his wild followers, he forces the half-senseless girl away; the others cover his retreat. Like Leonidas’ band at Thermopylæ, they struggle in the narrow passage. Their short weapons are powerless against the Danish halberds; but in falling, their bodies block the way.

Now Christian, in his coat of mail, steps through the door that has baffled his assailants. Gustav Rosen follows. Deadly pale, he surveys the tempest which his outcry has brought down upon the tranquil home of his childhood. The torches throw a lurid, hideous glare upon the mute faces on the ground. His eye catches a glimpse of something white at the end of the passage. It is Karine’s dress. Roused from his lethargy, he runs back, and hurries down the main stairway; he leads the soldiers, whom he still finds in the court, around the corner into the garden to the door, through which Karine, many months ago, secretly admitted Gustav Folkung.

“Here!” he cries; and with the weighty halberd, snatched from the hand of the nearest Dane, he

strikes against the wood. A hundred blows follow his. The door yields, and with a crash falls under Rosen's impetuosity. Again, upon the same spot, he stands face to face with Gustav Folkung's flaming eyes. But they have no power over him. Heedless of the spears of the Dalecarles, who throng after their leader, he grasps the shoulder of his betrothed. She lies senseless in Folkung's arm, while with his right hand he thrusts open the heavy oaken door that leads downward into the earth.

"Karine!" cried the youth, "Karine!"

In his voice lay despairing anguish, such as might have called the dying to life. It rouses Karine; the cry of love trembles through every fibre of her heart; she opens her eyes and looks at him.

"Karine!"

"Go, traitor!" A shudder runs through her body, and her hand motions him back.

Gustav Rosen had raised his arm to seize Folkung, but before Karine's glance his hand sank powerless. Her white dress vanished, as if swallowed by the earth, behind the massive door. Motionless, as if struck by lightning, the youth stands face to face

with the fierce valley-men, the soldiers endeavoring to shield him. At this end of the passage the conflict begins anew, but this time it turns in favor of the Swedes, who, surrounded on all sides, succeed with the strength of despairing men in forcing the Danes to the outer door, and maintaining their own position. The soldiers, believing them prisoners within, abate their eagerness, not to drive the desperate men to extremities. A dozen Dalecarles, pierced by halberds, lie upon the ground, among half a hundred of the king's mercenaries; but the remaining ones reach the oaken door, which the last one, fighting on its threshold, closes with a mighty crash, and secures on the inside with heavy bolts. Wounded and bleeding, he follows his mates, who, as if treading on living coals, speed through the long dark passage. It has, from time immemorial, saved many lives in seasons of sore distress; it saves them now.

The foremost, indeed, bears in his arms another burden than that which he came to carry away. It was to be a man; and it is a young girl. He should have worn upon his head the golden crown of the three kingdoms of the North; and from

Karine's unconscious brow flow only dishevelled masses of golden hair. Nearer and stronger their footsteps resound beneath the trembling earth. They have reached the spot where a few hours since the rooks disappeared among the rocks. With his knee, Folkung forces aside the stone that closes the entrance, and, with the fresh air that meets them, the deafening roar of the Trollhätta strikes their ears. It rouses Karine, and her limbs shiver in the cool breath of the early dawn. Tenderly, as if she were a child, her protector folds his cloak around her, and turns stream-upwards. The others follow. A shrill whistle, an answer from the opposite shore of the Elf, and a broad, dark object rapidly crosses the river. It proves to be a large ferry-boat, brought down from the lake. It strikes the bank, and already Folkung is within, resting his charge upon some rugs at the bottom of the boat. Stenbock follows with knitted brows, and the Dalecarles crowd after him. Suddenly there is confusion. Looking about her, Karine exclaims, "Where is my mother?"

Stenbock utters a cry: "We have forgotten her; she is in the tyrant's hand; we must go back."

"Impossible," answers their leader's calm voice ; "it would be certain death, and altogether useless." Stenbock refuses to listen, and forces his way through the crowded boat, when a cry reaches them, —

"Here they are — hold them — into the water — a boat !"

Gustav Rosen, the only one acquainted with the subterranean road, in his despair, after the last of the Dalecarles had disappeared, gathered together a few soldiers, and led them over the hills to the Trollhätta. But again he came too late. Folkung's commanding voice was heard, —

"Forward ! Sweden is of more value than a woman, even though her name be Brita Stenbock."

The oars struck the water, and with lightning speed the boat cleft the waves. The Danes raised their spears, to throw them into the dense crowd of fugitives ; but Rosen sprang before their weapons, crying in terror, —

"No — you will kill her — no !" Astonished, the soldiers obeyed. Then they sprang forward and held the youth, who had plunged into the water to swim after the boat. They drew him back and listened indifferently to his heart-rending wail, —

“Karine — Karine !”

His call was distinctly heard by those in the boat ; by all but Gustav Stenbock, whose gray head was buried in his cloak, to hide the tears that rose from his heart, — as scorching and as hopeless as the young man’s, who mourned for what he never possessed. But Folkung and Karine heard the loud, despairing cry, —

“Gustav Vasa, I will do whatever you command me ; give her back to me, Gustav Vasa.”

Karine started, and in the uncertain light peered eagerly into her companion’s face. “By what name does he call you ? Are you Gustav Erikson ?”

Folkung nodded. “I am, Karine ; you hear it by your lover’s last greeting.”

He smiled bitterly as he said it, and quickly stepped before the girl, to shield her from the spears that suddenly came hissing through the air, and fell, splashing, into the water. The Danes, when they heard the Swedish leader’s name, were no longer to be controlled ; and, howling with rage, they hurled after him their deadly missiles. But the distance was widening, and, with a few strokes of the oar, the Dalecarles were beyond their reach.

“Do you wish to go back to Gustav Rosen, Karine?” asked Folkung. “Say so, and I myself will take you to him.” It was the same sharp voice with which he had spoken to her last autumn, by the Trollhätta; and it seemed as if the motion of the boat were trembling through his words. Karine answered, without hesitation:

“Never! between us lies an abyss, as between this side of the Trollhätta and that. My heart no longer belongs to him who could betray Sweden.”

Gustav Erikson’s strong lips trembled visibly. “But to him who delivers Sweden, Karine? Does your heart belong to him who frees Sweden from Christian’s yoke?”

She shuddered; she tried to speak, but at the same moment the boat struck the shore; she staggered, and would have fallen, had not Gustav Vasa’s arm caught her. He held her cold hand in his, and, bending down, whispered again, —

“Who can deserve this hand, Karine?”

“This hand —” it had already grown so light that the color in her cheeks, changing from pallor to burning red, could be plainly seen; her glowing eyes sought her father’s bowed form, and then, stead-

fastly looking into the face of the man by her side, she continued — “this hand is free, Gustav Erikson, and shall belong to him who achieves two things —” The waters of the Trollhätta drown Karine’s hurried words. These are the waters of which the legend relates that a bard stood upon their shores, and, overcome by the fascination of the thundering stream, leaped headlong into its depths.

Did she think of it, as she shivered in the morning air, and gazed upon the grim, rolling waves? Her face was grave. Her companion’s face changed when he heard her whispered words. Then he bowed deeply before Karine Stenbock, and answered :

“I said once that Sweden was of more value than a woman. You are the first woman, Karine Stenbock, that has shaken my will. Upon your head be Sweden’s future, if it is lost for such a cause.”

Again he bowed with knightly grace, and joined the Dalecarles, who had already landed. Choosing four from among their number, he spoke to them in a low voice. The hearts of the valley-men were unacquainted with fear ; otherwise the

expression of their faces might have been mistaken for alarm ; neither did they dream of disobeying their leader. At a sign from him, they re-entered the boat, while he approached Stenbock. The few words he spoke brought new life into the sad eyes, and Stenbock made a hasty motion toward the boat. But Gustav Vasa detained him, speaking more urgently, until Stenbock reluctantly assented, and, grasping the young man's hand, shook it long and heartily, after true Swedish fashion.

"They all obey him," thought Karine, observing his proud, almost regal bearing. He joined the four already in the boat, and remained standing, as with heavy strokes they pushed from the shore.

A greeting from the departing boat interrupted Karine's thoughts. She waved her hand, involuntarily calling, "Gustav — " and quickly remembering, she added, "Farewell, Gustav Vasa !"





CHAPTER VI.

THE first pale rays of the morning sun were struggling with the red glare of the torches when Gustav Rosen returned to Torpa. His feet bore him mechanically ; his cheeks were sunken, his eyes hollow, as if some deadly disease had seized him over-night. Unwittingly he walked on, drawn to the scene of his happiness and his misery. In the courtyard he met an officer who told him that the king had asked for him ; and, taking the young man's arm, he led him upstairs to the monarch's apartment. To those acquainted with his nature, it was evident that King Christian was in a dangerous mood. Guarded by numerous soldiers, the men and maid servants of Stenbock's household stood huddled together in a corner of the room. Christian, seated near the window,

examined them separately. Their evidence was always the same : they had known nothing of the contemplated attack, and were as completely taken by surprise as the king himself. The truth of their statement could not be doubted, since none of them had thought of escaping in the confusion, and they were driven together without any resistance on their part. King Christian himself seemed convinced ; and, as he dismissed them one by one, he smiled pleasantly, saying, —

“ I believe you ; I see that your rest was needlessly disturbed. It shall not occur again. Go ! ”

At a sign from him, they were led away ; but as each one approached the stairs, he was met from behind by the executioner’s sword, and summarily despatched. One after the other had disappeared, until only a young maid-servant was left. Christian seemed to weary of his monotonous sport ; he rose and went to the window. Then turning, he scanned the features of her bright, expressive face, which, being of the true Swedish type, bore a remote resemblance to that of Karine Stenbock.

“ Down by the stairs lie the heads of a dozen

fools. If you wish to keep your own, go down, gather them into your apron, and bring them to me." The girl fell down, fainting; he beckoned:

"Carry her away, and let her do as I ordered."

"The girl resembles the daughter of that scoundrel, Stenbock, — probably a half-sister," whispered one of the courtiers to his neighbor. The speaker started, for Christian turned his head, and a terrible glance met the imprudent man. Then the king rushed toward the tottering girl, and clutching her shoulder with an iron grip, glared into her face with an expression of beast-like ferocity.

"He is right: she is of the same brood," he muttered; "this is the face that fooled me."

And before she had time to plead for mercy, King Christian II. of Sweden, Norway, and Denmark snatched a sword from the nearest bystander, and with his own hand slew the girl he had just pardoned.

At this moment Gustav Rosen entered the room. The king's restless glance observed him immediately, and, laughing gayly, he approached the youth.

“Here lies the head of your beauty, Rosen!” he cried.

The young man’s brain was so confused, that he almost broke down at the sight of the fair head, whose distant resemblance to Karine had not been effaced by death. Christian’s loud laughter brought him to his senses.

“This time it is not she,” the king continued. “It seems the Rose has escaped us both. Curse it!” Suddenly the veins upon his forehead swelled; he struck his foot upon the floor, so that the windows shook, and those standing near started nervously. “Where is the scoundrel that allowed her to escape? You are traitors, — one and all.”

No one ventured to approach him, when, his face distorted with rage, he picked up the sword he had flung aside, and, like a madman, swung it hissing around the heads of the frightened Danes. Once only had they seen him thus; it was after the death of the Dove of Amsterdam, whom Torben Oxe’s kin were thought to have poisoned. It was evident that he raved most violently, not when his royal authority had been defied, but when a certain spot, deep hidden in his heart, was touched. It

was not Gustav Erikson, but Karine Stenbock, who had increased his rage to frenzy. Gradually, as none opposed him, he grew calmer; then seating himself, and leaning his hand upon the hilt of the sword, whose point he thrust deep into the wooden floor, he commanded, —

“Bring Brita Stenbock to me.”

In a few moments she appeared. Her arms were laden with heavy chains, such as the Danish monarch carried with him in all his travels, but she bore them as though their weight were nothing. Not a feature of her face betrayed fear or agitation. At the sight of her, Gustav Rosen staggered: horror-stricken, his eyes rested upon his aunt's immovable countenance, and the consciousness of his guilt brought a crimson flush to his temples.

For a moment there was the silence of death in the great room, in the middle of which stood Brita Stenbock, calm and stately. She broke the silence, asking, —

“Who called me?”

The king started, as if with fear; his eyes were fastened upon the ground. “I,” he answered, in an uncertain voice.

Those who saw him might have fancied that the dead eyes of his implacable enemy had recovered their sight, so shrinkingly his glance avoided them. Again there was a pause, then he suddenly commanded, —

“Take away her chains.”

The astonished soldiers obeyed. The king rose and hesitatingly advanced a few steps,

“Brita Stenbock, you meant to murder me —”

“I meant to punish you ; it is you who murder,” she answered coldly. It seemed as if he, feared by all, himself stood in awe of a woman. Anxiously he peered into her face ; he possessed no power over Brita Stenbock’s blind eyes.

“You invited me to your house, and I came, trusting in Swedish hospitality,” he continued.

“You invited the Swedish lords to your house in Stockholm, and they trusted in Danish hospitality.”

Christian cast down his eyes. Was it weariness, after the tumult that had raged in his breast ? His lips trembled ; with an effort he forced them to obey his thoughts, and said, —

“You took me by the hand and bade me welcome in your house, Brita Stenbock.”

“You took by the hand and welcomed each one of those *you* meant to kill. I thanked you in the name of my country, and told you that I hoped your sojourn in our house would bring good fortune to Sweden. When you drank to the health of my house, I answered by drinking to the welfare of Sweden. Why were you too blind to understand me? Why did you allow my blindness to deceive your sight?”

Her voice was full of scorn. With bated breath the bystanders beheld this fearless woman. Their master's face wore a strange, anxious expression. He lifted his hand to his brow, and tried to speak; but his tongue grew more and more reluctant. With an effort he said, —

“It was might against might, cunning against cunning. You hate me, Brita Stenbock, and you were in the right. Among men there is warfare, and I honor you as a man. You have fought bravely; I admire your courage. Speak truly: the plan was yours? None knew of it save yourself? You, unaided, put it into execution? Tell me this, and I will acknowledge the greatness of your deed. You shall be free.”

In the wide hall, among a hundred eyes, fixed upon her face, can it be Brita Stenbock's blind eyes alone that see; that perceive the tiny rift between the meshes of his armor, through which to thrust the dagger into her enemy's stony heart? A strange, exultant smile hovered about her lips.

"No, Christian of Denmark, you esteem me too highly. To me belongs only counsel; neither the conception nor the execution was mine. A girl outwitted you. But my daughter did not know you, and did not suppose that you would come to a wedding with an army. There was to have been a battle at Torpa. But when my daughter saw the number of your followers —"

King Christian's hand passed slowly down from his forehead, over his eyes. "When your daughter saw the number of my followers," his lips repeated, with a peculiar sound, like a sob.

"Then she came to me, and said, 'Christian of Denmark is not only a tyrant, he is a fool. Is Sweden's liberty, is his ruin worth it, that I should for an evening play the part of the inn-keeper's daughter of Bergen?'"

Even Brita Stenbock paused in amazement at the wild, agonizing cry that burst from the king's breast. He sank back into the chair, covering his face with both hands. Those around him scarcely ventured to breathe. Heavy drops rolled from under the royal hands ; it was so still they could be heard falling upon the floor. Then his hands were loosed ; he seized the sword he had thrust into the floor, and drew it out. King Christian laughed aloud.

“ You tell your story well, Brita Stenbock ; but our time does not permit us to converse with you longer. And so we, the Danish tyrant, have undermined Swedish hospitality, honor, and fidelity ? You are right again ; we were a fool — ”

“ You may scoff, Christian,” the gray-haired woman interrupted his words, “ but I have dealt you a deadly blow. My eyes are blind ; but while others may think you are laughing, I see your heart ; and I know it is bleeding under my hand.”

With a cry of rage upon his quivering lips, the king, raising his sword, sprang toward the defenceless woman ; and had not Gustav Rosen intercepted the fierce stroke, she would have shared the fate

of the young maid-servant ; her gray head had lain beside the golden one. For a moment, Christian stared at the youth's pale face ; then he allowed the sword to fall from his hands, and said in icy tones, —

“I thank you, Rosen. Through my fault you were robbed of your bride. I will provide you another. Are you ready, Brita Stenbock?”

His meaning was clear to them all, especially to the woman to whom his question was addressed. But her courage never wavered ; once more she proudly lifted her head.

“You do not punish me, Christian ; you will only murder me. Death does not frighten me ; and what will mine profit you ? You can kill me, but the spirit of this house you can never destroy. Through the night of my blindness, I see far into the future. The day is at hand when the whole of Sweden will be a Torpa. I see blood flowing, — more than has flowed into the Mälar ; but it rolls toward the Sund, and giant torches light the way. By their light I see you, Christian of Denmark, powerless, deserted, despised, and hated. I see your pallid brow, weighted with the curses of

your people, with the scorn of mankind, striking the walls of your dungeon, while the ghosts of Stockholm's victims mock you through the prison-bars, and frighten you back to life ; because you dread to appear before the throne upon which Another sits, and where your power is at an end. Then the Trollhätta will sing the song of Sweden's freedom for all to hear, as I hear it now."

Majestically she stretched forth her hand ; and through the utter silence that followed her words were heard the thunder-tones of the Trollhätta, bearing sea-ward the last masses of the winter's ice, and proclaiming through the land the glad tidings that spring had come. For a moment King Christian himself listened, spell-bound. But it was the old, gloomy face, over whose unfathomable features flickered, like a will-o'-the-wisp, the treacherous smile.

"Your eyes are still too keen, and see too far into the future, Brita Stenbock," he sneered. "I will kindle a light that will enable you to see what is close at hand. I will build you a goodly monument. As for the Trollhätta, it is mine ; and

henceforward its waters shall glide submissively under my hand, like your people. The spirit of this house shall not spread further, and Sweden shall not become a Torpa. The giant's torch which you saw is Torpa itself, and in its light you will lie fainting and alone. No, not quite alone — ” King Christian turned abruptly. “ As I said, Gustav Rosen, I owe you thanks for reminding me of what befits a king. You will be reasonable, and understand that at this moment I cannot restore to you your young bride. But it was to your wedding I came hither ; and for a short space you must content yourself with an old sweetheart, especially as she comes of the same noble race. Captain Wolmarson ! ”

Christian hastily whispered some orders to the captain, then, turning once more to Rosen, he said, —

“ Your estates will be well managed, Rosen ; thank you for them.”

And, measuring with a lightning-like glance Brita Stenbock's unmoved face, the king left the room. Below, the horns were calling the men together ; in a few minutes the court was filled with horse-

men, their master giving the signal for their departure.

Five saddled horses still stood at the gate, for Captain Wolmarson and the others who remained to do the king's bidding. They are not soldiers, but the assistants of the man in the close-fitting doublet, who has thrown aside his scarlet cloak, and roughly ties Gustav Rosen's hands behind his back. The officers standing near could not repress a shudder when the men, with rude laughter, loaded Brita Stenbock's limbs with fetters, and chained both her and Rosen to the altar, which had been prepared for so different a purpose. Now all was completed ; and, walking away, the headsman turned once more and laughed, —

“The pair is ready, — a merry bridegroom ; a bonny bride. Bring the priest, that he may pronounce a blessing !”

One of his servants ran to the kitchen, and, returning, distributed the wood he carried in his arms, while his companions dispersed into the adjoining apartments. Filled with horror, the Danish captain rushed into the open air and leaped upon his horse. Five minutes later the

others followed ; and, frequently turning to look behind them, they galloped away.

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And again Castle Torpa is silent as the grave, as silent as in that midnight hour when Karine Stenbock stood waiting for the Danish king. The first rays of the morning sun flash through the leafless elms upon the gray gables. Ghastly still lie the dead Dalecarles among their foes in the passages ; not a sound of life is heard, whether of joy or of pain.

A cry of mourning were indeed a greeting from heaven in the midst of this shuddering stillness, through which now and then is heard a feeble crackling, as if the walls were bending under invisible fingers.

A human voice speaks through the desolation, —

“Mother, do you hear it?” It is Gustav Rosen, who is vainly dragging at his chains ; but his fettered hands are powerless. Brita Stenbock knows what he means ; yet her answer is as chill as if he were a boy standing before her to receive his chastisement.

“I am not your mother, Gustav Rosen, and I bless the Heaven that prevented it. Far better the wedding-torch lighted by Christian of Denmark than to have intrusted my daughter to your traitor hands. My blood, and the blood of the brave men who were slain this night for Sweden’s freedom, be upon you !”

The crackling grows stronger on all sides. In the quiet morning air there is a rushing in the corridors, like the sound of an approaching storm. It seems as if the dead out yonder were rising and stumbling with heavy footsteps over the corpses of their comrades.

“Mother !” the youth cries in despair. “You are Karine’s mother. Speak a last word to me in Karine’s name. In a little while we go together where there are neither Swedes nor Danes, only forgiveness, and peace, and mercy. Have pity, mother !”

A shudder, the first in her life, perhaps, shakes the strong woman. She endeavors to free her arm, and vainly strains her sightless eyes toward the pleading youth. Then a gentle smile softens her firm lips, and she answers softly, —

“Your heart had no place in this hard world. God will forgive you, as Karine does, as I do. Sleep in peace, Gustav.”

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Over yonder, on a hill near Torpa, stood King Christian II., surrounded by his faithful followers. His knitted brows betrayed impatience, and his piercing eyes were turned toward the castle, now lighted by the sun's first rays. Soon the furrows were smoothed. A rosy cloud seemed to hover over the roof of the far-stretching building; heavy gray clouds, in which the red lightning was seen to quiver, followed it. The west side of the castle lay in the shadow, while toward the east the windows were ruddy with the reflection of the sunlight. But soon they were aglow in the west, in the south, — on all sides. Fiery tongues waved upward and downward; a thousand fiery arms clung to the walls. Suddenly a bright flame shot from the roof; the gray gable tottered and fell inward with a thunderous crash, followed by a shower of sparks and burning timbers tossed in the air. Like glowing meteors, they circled about, scattering far and near, falling into the white

foam of the Trollhätta, and at the feet of the mutely gazing Danes.

Not a vestige of life was seen near the surging flames, rising higher and higher, except the frightened birds that fluttered about the tops of the elm-trees. With the glance of a falcon, King Christian's eyes hung upon the door, and upon the garden surrounding Castle Torpa. The dead will not escape, and the living have not broken their chains. Only when the walls fell, the king turned away, and, with compressed lips, smiled ominously.

"That was your giant's torch, Brita Stenbock. Good-night!"

Fiercely he spurred his startled horse. "The wedding is over. We have enjoyed ourselves royally at Torpa. Forward!"

Soon the last spectators had disappeared from the scene, and the burning house stood solitary in the bright, smiling sunshine. It seemed as if the sunlight were holding it in a last embrace, with a last farewell to the love that grew within its walls, living through many summers and many winters, until the storm came that kindled the flames and turned it to ashes overnight.

Storms spend themselves, and flames are quenched, but the sun is everlasting, Karine; it returns again with every springtime, with every morning.

King Christian had spoken truly. Before evening Torpa had disappeared from the earth. But Brita Stenbock's words proved truer still. Neither fire nor sword can kill the spirit either of hate or of love, and in them Torpa still lived.

It was evening once more, and a dense, vaporous smoke hung over the ruins. Again the rooks were crossing the Göta-Elf, and taking their way northward. The moon scattered pale light upon the water, as the broad boat struck the shore at the same spot where Karine had stood when she called "Farewell" to Gustav Vasa.

Now it is "Farewell, Gustav Rosen!" Gustav Erikson says it, and Brita Stenbock. They both clasp his hand; death has held the young man's hand in his own, and has wiped away its stain.

"Farewell!" He is alone, listening to their retreating footsteps. As a last greeting from another life, the sound is wafted back to him, fainter and

fainter, until it is lost in the roaring of the Trollhätta.

It is well for him who would forget, to sit by the waters of the Trollhätta ; their thunder drowns the voices of the past.





CHAPTER VII.

A FEW short weeks have passed, but the winter's power over Sweden is broken. Not from the south came the springtime, but from the north, out of the rude valleys of Dalecarlia. The springtime is called Gustav Vasa. There is none else, from the mountains to the sea, who can help Sweden. The nobles are crushed; and it is well that their jealousy, which for centuries has shaken and enslaved the land, no longer thwarts the plans of its deliverer. In the towns, among the burghers, clash the arms of Christian's mercenaries, subduing them with iron hands.

From Copenhagen to Stockholm the land is laid waste; the villages are burned; the people have fled, or perished. The gallows and the

wheel mark the progress of the Northern monarch, since his visit to Torpa.

There is none to save Sweden but the people, — the stiff-necked peasants of the Kjölen. Therefore the Dalecarles have assembled together, from mountains and valleys, upon the great meadow, which the spring has covered with primroses, and have chosen Gustav Vasa “Lord and Captain over Sweden.”

And down from the mountains came Gustav Vasa. With a few hundreds he crossed the Dal-Elf, and thousands flocked to his banner, for the springtime had come. But, besides spring flowers and singing birds, he encountered an army of horsemen, who came, led by the treacherous Archbishop Trolle, to meet the Dalecarles near Brunnbäck’s Ferry.

The Dal-Elf’s waters were red when they carried the first retribution for the massacre of Stockholm into the Bothnian Sea ; and, with the news of the battle, Gustav Vasa himself reached the South.

“I told you at Torpa that we should meet again, King Christian ; you will not escape the sight of me until the Sund flows between you and Sweden.”

With this message he sent a horseman to the Danish king. But before the messenger had fastened the scroll to the palace-gate, Gustav Vasa had again beaten the Danes, near Westerås; and with so many thousands that they could be called no longer a band of peasants, but rather a noble and stately army, he besieged the town of Westerås, defended by Slaghök, once a barber's apprentice, now confessor to the king. The town was taken by storm.

“And the Jutes, how they fled, how with voices so loud
They sang this most pitiful song:
The Devil may drink all the beer that is brewed
At the Dalecarle's anvil and tongs.”

When the midsummer sun stood at its zenith, and night and day touched each other's hand, Upsala, the ancient seat of the Swedish kings, fell into Gustav Vasa's hands.

Here he remained. The impetuous enthusiasm of his adherents was an excellent thing to overcome the Danish troops in open warfare; but the rude strength of the peasants was not equal to a long and wearisome siege. They must needs be accustomed to military discipline, trained in the

use of arms. Their weapons were chiefly their hunting and farming implements, — the axe, with which they felled the trees in their native forest ; the bow and the sling used in hunting the ptarmigan ; the pike, with which they defended their flocks against bears and wolves. But Gustav Vasa's eye and hand were everywhere. Trusting in Lübeck's promise of assistance, he had, with wise forethought, requested arms from the Hansa towns, and himself taught the ignorant valley-men the use of the musket. Leaders, chosen by him, traversed the land in every direction, calling upon the people to rise. Everywhere companies were formed, which afterwards united their forces, and successfully attacked the Danish garrisons in the smaller towns. Soon the Lowlands were wholly in the hands of the deliverer, and Christian's officers were forced to retire into the fortified places, — chiefly into the cities on the coast, which, like Stockholm, could be constantly supplied with soldiers and provisions. Brita Stenbock had spoken truly : in a few short weeks the whole of Sweden had become a Torpa ; and Christian, from the windows of his palace at Copenhagen, gazed in

impotent wrath across the Sund. He had been obliged to return to Denmark, because his own rebellious nobles, profiting by his absence, had endeavored to arouse the indignation of the people against their tyrant.

Each band, great or small, that fought for the deliverance of Sweden, readily acknowledged Gustav Vasa's supremacy, and rendered him homage as the "Lord and Captain over Sweden."

And so all went to Upsala, the ancient seat of the Swedish kings, where in the olden time the mighty Ynglings had ruled. The city no longer stood upon the old site, but a league farther to the east. Only a village, hidden among linden-trees, marked the spot where the ruins of the former Queen of the North lay sleeping beneath trailing ivy and waving grass. Above the houses rose an ancient church, with square granite tower; a Runic stone, built into the choir, spoke the strange language of olden times, unintelligible to the present generation. Beside the church were three steep hillocks, the "Kings' Mounds," still, in the minds of the people, sacred to Thor, Freya, and Odin. Giant tumuli of Ynglings, they were presum-

ably the legendary witnesses of a time when the gods were wont to descend from Valhalla, to found kingdoms here below, and to wed the fair daughters of earth. Now the dense beech-trees that crown their summits rustle in the north wind, and scatter their leaves upon the rude boulders that mark the sleeping-chamber of the giant heroes.

Anyone sitting upon one of these stones, and looking eastward through the trees, might discern the huge gray Cathedral of Upsala, its Gothic spires rising far above the sombre "skog," Sweden's primeval forest, which with a wild medley of pines and fir-trees, alders and beeches, covered the wide plain. Beside the road, well-made for the time, that led from Old Upsala to the new city, were occasional clearings, where moss-covered boulders, a tall fern nodding here and there from a cleft in the stone, lay scattered over the naked ground. Notwithstanding the high latitude, Sweden's mid-summer sun lay warm upon the land; and the road might seem long to the wayfarer from the village to the Cathedral Square at Upsala.

The mighty nave rose high above the low, one-storied houses, like a giant among pygmies. Almost

all the houses were built of wood and roofed with the gray bark of the birch-tree, giving the town a monotonous appearance. Already, half a century before, Sten Sture the Elder had founded at Upsala the first Swedish university; but for long years its cloisters had been deserted. Science was silenced by the clash of arms, amid which the living generation had grown up; and mournfully, bereft of her old glory and her new, the Kings' City clustered around the Cathedral, the sole remnant of her glorious past. Grass grew upon the pavements, no longer trodden by scholars' feet; and Upsala lay silent and melancholy, like the surrounding landscape, its burghers rarely meeting in the streets, and hurrying past each other with hasty, timid greetings.

Thus it had been a few weeks ago; but one summer-month had sufficed to work a change. It had taken no longer to cover field and forest with gay verdure and transform, as if by magic, the wintry aspect of the town. Crowds thronged the thoroughfares. The Dalecarles, whose fair hair fell in heavy masses over their rugged foreheads, seemed to tower above the roofs of the low build-

ings ; the supple sons of Gotland and Ingermanland moved more gracefully ; clearly distinguishable were the more intelligent features of the townsman, who possibly had seen something of the world and its ways beyond the Baltic, and had acquired more cosmopolitan manners. In richer clothing he walked through the crowd, proud to be seen by the side of the stately men whose frequent questions, whose speech and manners betrayed the foreigner. These were the gentlemen from Lübeck, envoys from the heads of the Hansa, who had but recently landed at Norrtelge, bringing the necessary supplies for the subduer of their old enemy and rival, and desiring to make themselves acquainted with the extent and prospects of the Swedish rising as well as with the personal character of its leader. With prudent, business-like reserve, they pursued their inquiries. But soon the universal enthusiasm had caught them also ; and the reports they sent back to the banks of the Trave soon dispelled all mistrust in any matter confided to the keeping of Gustav Erikson. They were frequently met in his company, and still more frequently were seen at nightfall to enter

the modest house he occupied, only to leave it at break of day. At other times they mingled freely among the people, admiring with most unbusiness-like eyes the handsome maidens from Upland and Gefleborg, with their sea-blue eyes and heavy yellow hair, who bravely made their way through the multitude. In the daytime, the fields surrounding the town were converted into a camp glittering with arms of every description and of infinite variety, in the handling of which Gustav Vasa himself instructed his eager followers. The horsemen exercised upon short-maned, thick-set horses of incredible strength and endurance; and the reports of the new fire-arms, cautiously examined by the older bystanders, were heard from morning until night. The generous forethought of the gentlemen from Lübeck, not content with supplying muskets, had sent ammunition in such abundance that, with the troublesome and tedious method of loading, it would have sufficed for the needs of an army through years of warfare.

The houses of Upsala were indeed rather inadequate for the accommodation of her numerous

guests, peaceful and warlike, who came from north and from south. But the citizens cheerfully yielded what they had to the deliverers. A spirit of exemplary order, of true Northern solidity and sobriety, prevailed in the overcrowded town. But in the evening, after the day's work was done, songs were everywhere heard in the streets, especially the new "Brunnback" ballad; while an hour before midnight the sun still stood in golden splendor in the heavens.

But all noise and singing in Upsala's streets were hushed; all heads uncovered; women lifted their children upon their arms; young maidens forced their way through the throng; old men's eyes sparkled with the fire of renewed youth, when Gustav Vasa's tall figure passed by, simply dressed, and scarcely higher in stature than the crowd of his followers, but distinguished from among his companions by an indescribable superiority. It was the same face which upon that memorable November evening had confronted Karine Stenbock; but his brow had grown more thoughtful, and was seamed, in advance of his years, with slight furrows. On the right side it was defaced

by a broad scar, reaching downward to the temple. It did not look like a wound caused by a sharp weapon, but rather seemed burned into the flesh, and the hair near it was singed. Instead of detracting from the manly beauty of his face, it rather heightened the imposing energy of his countenance, whose eyes mirrored forth a world of thought, or at will baffled the scrutiny of the wisest. No one ever fathomed their depths, neither the trusting simplicity of the Dalecarles, nor the shrewd glances of the diplomatic merchants from Germany. Those who fancied themselves acquainted with Gustav Erikson's secret thoughts were mistaken.

So were his companions, who on this afternoon had waited for more than an hour by his side ; while he, so rarely idle, sat immovable upon his horse, gazing expectantly through the sultry sunshine of this July day, along the road that leads to Gefle. Something of moment must be expected from the seaboard town, since he who scarcely rests even at night, and leaves no moment of the day unoccupied, can master his impatience, and take no heed of the flight of time. His comrades exchange whispered guesses as to the object of his waiting ;

they are of the opinion that a personage of great importance, perhaps a messenger from Russia, or one from Lübeck, announcing the arrival of fresh troops, is about to arrive. Of the latter, the gentlemen of the Hansa had no knowledge ; but they thought it not impossible that the young commander, with his impenetrable eyes, had found means, without their intervention, to open the gates of the ancient city on the Trave, behind which lay power and influence and wealth. Like their leader, all gazed perseveringly down the sunny road leading to Gefle.

Almost imperceptibly Gustav Vasa's expression changed ; and a moment later, those around him discerned in the distance a small object, slowly moving over the yellow sand of the highway. Gradually it grew larger, and soon they were able to distinguish an open travelling-carriage, — a rare occurrence in those days. It was a heavy, lumbering coach, drawn by clumsy horses ; and in it sat two women, — the one, with snowy hair clustering about her temples, gazed with singular fixedness into the dazzling sunshine ; the other, whose golden hair lay like sunlight upon her brow, timidly turned

aside her downcast eyes. Curiously, but without special interest, some of the bystanders glanced at the two. Now the carriage rolled past the waiting horsemen, still engaged in whispered conversation, when Gustav Vasa, lifting his hat, made a low obeisance before the travellers. In an instant every head was uncovered, and all eyes rested with surprise upon the face of the young girl, whom their leader had so courteously saluted. But already the carriage had passed on. Deeply blushing, the fair girl had silently returned his greeting, and for a second her eyes had scanned his face, when Gustav Vasa turned his horse, and rode back to the city. Evidently, nothing further was expected. Gustav Vasa had spent hours in inaction, simply to greet a young girl and to receive a greeting in return. Like lightning, the news spread through Upsala; and now it was the women's business to discuss and conjecture. But no one knew the beautiful stranger's name, or destination. All that could be learned was that the carriage had scarcely entered the town, but had turned aside, taking the road to Old Upsala.

There it arrived, early in the afternoon. Close

by the venerable church-tower stood a pleasant house, larger and more convenient than the others in the village. Here the travellers halted. Men-servants and maids stood at the entrance, and received them in respectful silence. Leaning on her daughter's arm, Brita Stenbock entered the house.

Everything was arranged with exquisite taste for their comfort, —smaller, but more convenient, and less suggestive of sober Northern simplicity, than at Castle Torpa. The furniture, the costly hangings, were of other than Swedish workmanship; the wealth, the foreign connections of a great commercial city had supplied them. Had Gustav Vasa, in his petitions to the Hansa confederation, included other matters beside fire-arms and soldiers for the defence of Sweden? Had he also planned a garden for the Rose of the Trollhätta, so rudely torn from her native soil?

This abode was certainly more fitting than the wilderness in which she had sojourned since her flight across the Göta-Elf. She had not seen Gustav Vasa since she called her "farewell" across the water. Horses were in readiness, and her

father lifted her into the saddle. They journeyed at night, and in the daytime found shelter in lonely farmhouses, hidden among the mountains, whose inmates were always found to be aware of their coming. Thus they reached the wild, precipitous mountains that divide Sweden from Norway. Even here they were not safe; the Danish garrisons in the towns had orders to pursue them, and the king had set a high price upon the head of Karine Stenbock. By rude mountain-roads, still covered with deep snow, they travelled northward. It was a weary, perilous journey; but Karine seemed heedless of fatigue, of hunger and cold. The peasants gazed in astonishment at the frail, girlish form, thus defying the rough country, the inclement weather; and many who had but deaf ears to other warnings were won by Karine's glowing words. They threw aside their peaceful tools, and hastened to Dalecarlia, where, as was reported, the deliverers of Sweden were assembling.

"I call you in Gustav Vasa's name," said Karine, with burning eyes. Then they went further. A mournful procession indeed, they rode through the lonely, deserted country, a prey to their sad

thoughts. They knew nothing of what had occurred since their flight from Torpa; nothing of the fate of the blind woman, who had fallen into Christian's cruel hands. Not until they had crossed the Clara-Elf, a messenger overtook them, bringing tidings of Brita Stenbock's escape, and of her journey northward over Lake Wener. Shuddering, Karine heard how Gustav Vasa and his four companions waited in the underground passage until the Danes should leave; and how the leader, tortured by anxiety, and undaunted by the peril of death, had groped his way over corpses into the house, and had lain down among them to listen. But even he had no conception of what was about to happen. He only heard that Brita Stenbock and Gustav Rosen were put in chains, and left behind. Then he heard the hurry and confusion of the king's departure. At the same moment the red glare of approaching torches fell upon his face; a rude foot, in an iron-bound shoe, trod upon his breast; a crackling and hissing ran along the walls; and a suffocating smoke filled the passage. He sprang to his feet, heedless of the possible presence of enemies, and opened the door leading

to the hall. In the dense smoke he was scarcely able to distinguish the two immovable figures chained to the altar. A moment more, and he had been too late to undo their fetters ; too late, with Gustav Rosen's assistance, to carry Brita Stenbock through the burning corridors. Burning timbers fell crashing behind them ; a fire-brand struck his forehead, but he reached the door that led to safety, when, exhausted by his superhuman exertions, he sank unconscious into the arms of the anxious, waiting Dalecarles.

Impatiently — it seemed like an eternity — they waited for the night, when, unseen and unharmed, they might reach the Göta-Elf, which should carry them to Lake Wener.

Breathlessly, with tears of joy and sorrow, Stenbock and his daughter listened to the tale. Their home lay in ashes ; never again would their eyes rest upon Castle Torpa. But what was Torpa, compared with Sweden's freedom ? Sweden was now their only home ; and Karine received it as an intimation from on high that hereafter she belonged to her country rather than to the narrow spot where she had dreamed away her childhood.

And what was the destruction of a house, in comparison with her mother's life, which Gustav Vasa had saved at the peril of his own?

Deep crimson stained her cheeks at the thought. Perhaps she remembered the promise the *Trollhätta* had witnessed: "This hand is free, Gustav Erikson, and belongs to him who achieves two things — "

"Upon your head be Sweden's future if it is lost for a woman," he had replied as he sprang into the boat.

One of the two things had been achieved. And the second? Would he accomplish that also? And afterwards, when he should come and say, "It is done, Karine," what then?

Then he would have an indisputable right to the guerdon her eyes had promised him, to the hand he so ardently desired. And why not? The eyes that had a heart to give away are dead. Not a gleam broke from them when the messenger related the fate of Gustav Rosen; her lips never opened to ask for tidings of him. The light in her eyes is quenched, like the flames that consumed Torpa; and like it, her heart has become ashes.

But beneath the ashes, Karine, a spark still glows. The storm passing over it subdued the hidden flame. But when the storm is laid, and peace returns; when the summer's breath gently touches the ruin, — it may rekindle the slumbering embers.

And farther Karine journeys, by her father's side, and rekindles the sparks that sleep under Sweden's ashes.

"I call you in the name of Gustav Vasa," she says; "he will deliver Sweden."

In the western part of Dalecarlia, Karine rejoined her mother; and here Stenbock left them to join Gustav Erikson's army. In her feverish enthusiasm Karine would have accompanied him in disguise, herself to take a part in the struggle for what now constituted the chief aim of her life, and to which even the duty owing to her blind mother appeared secondary. In his trouble, her father applied secretly to Gustav Vasa, and from him Karine received the command to relinquish her purpose.

As the general of Sweden's army, he wrote, he must exact implicit obedience from all who would

serve the cause of their country. He was endeavoring to do what Karine desired, and she must obey his wishes in return. He bade her accompany her mother to Old Upsala, where he had prepared a house for their reception. A carriage would await them at Gefle. The hour of their departure from thence, and that of their arrival at Upsala, were distinctly stated. Gustav Vasa's mind comprehended and ordered all matters, the smallest as well as the greatest.

And so they reached the house beside the church in Old Upsala. In it there was nothing to rearrange, nothing to alter. Each room in the dwelling seemed to have been planned by a woman's delicate taste and forethought, and yet a man's hand had ordered it all. Whosoever chose to remember that it was the hand that held Sweden's future must needs acknowledge that the arrangements of the house under the linden-trees in Old Upsala expressed something more than forethought and refined taste, — more even than gratitude and friendship.

Karine felt it as toward evening she went out into the open air. She had passed a restless

afternoon, — her thoughts lingering upon the road that had brought them hither. Perhaps the trials of the past weeks had preyed upon her nerves. She started at every opening of a door, at every sound of a strange voice. Gradually, as the day waned, her calmness returned ; and, passing through the garden, she went out into the fields. She saw with surprise the three mounds of the ancient kings, and from an old villager she learned their names and meaning. Then she walked slowly through the tall flower-spangled grass of the meadow, and ascended Odin's Hill.

The dead leaves of last year still lay strewn over the granite boulder upon whose edge she seated herself. In the remote past it might have served as a sacrificial stone ; the Runic tablets in the church-wall, which Karine had observed in passing, perhaps told its story. It was a spot where people were tempted to forget the present, to linger in the past with their thoughts, or to speed them far into the future. What were individual joys and sorrows, in the great flood of time that carried with it years and centuries ? Whose were the voices that were heard by this stone, before the giant trees,

their branches swaying in the evening wind, had struck their first feeble roots into the earth? When years and centuries have gone by, who will remember the maiden now resting beneath them, and looking out upon life as if she understood its meaning? Not for pleasure was life given, but for duty; not to shape it according to our fancy, but to serve others with it; to yield it for worthy ends, even at the cost of sore struggles and self-denial.

Karine softly whispered these words. It was late in the evening, but the sun still stood in the heavens. Almost horizontally the strange green, melancholy rays of the northern sunset lay upon the silent valley, whose inhabitants had already gone to rest, until the ruddy dawn, a few hours hence, should again call them to their labors. Strangely still and sad it seemed up yonder, above the sleeping world, upon which the daylight still shone. In the distance, above the dark pine-forest, gleamed the golden balls on the cathedral spires of Upsala, throwing their reflection into Karine's thoughtful eyes.

"Of what are you thinking, Rose of the Trollhätta?" suddenly said a voice behind her.

Hastily rising, she stood face to face with Gustav Erikson. She had scarcely seen him since the evening she helped him to escape from Castle Torpa. Fate had since then reversed their positions; through that same underground passage he had rescued her, bearing her away unconscious, unresisting, in his arms.

He had done far more; the flush rising to her temples told that she was aware of it. And yet she stood motionless, as she had done long ago, by the Trollhätta, when his strong hand had for the first time given her back to life. Her eyes rested questioningly upon the scar on his forehead, but her lips were powerless to frame a word. His brows knitted; the joyous expression his face had worn when he first spoke faded away, and in a changed, harsh, uncertain voice he continued, —

“Have I not yet earned your thanks, Karine? Have I not yet deserved your hand?”

She misunderstood him; her lips quivered; almost inaudibly she stammered, —

“Sweden is not yet free — ”

“You are right; but you at least shall be free,”

he exclaimed, his voice trembling and full of unspeakable bitterness, the muscles of his face working painfully. "You do well to remind me that whoso gives his life for freedom does it not with the hope of reward ; that whoso battles for the liberty of a people must not restrain that of an individual. I give you back your promise, Karine Stenbock : whether Sweden becomes free or not, words are light as air since Christian of Denmark visited Castle Torpa. Farewell ! "

Before the girl could answer, he had reached the foot of Odin's Hill, where his horse stood waiting. He sprang into the saddle and with reckless speed rode back to Upsala. Karine gazed after him, pale as death. The horse reared and plunged ; the rider's wild excitement was seen in the animal's frightened movements.

The distance was too great when Karine recovered herself, and called, with trembling lips, "Gustav Vasa !" He did not hear. A nameless fear seized upon her ; the sleeping world and the sun overhead reeled before her eyes. "Words have grown light as air since Christian of Denmark visited Castle Torpa," she murmured. Suddenly

her strength forsook her ; stretching out her hands, she fell to the ground, close by the ancient Stone of Sacrifice.

Karine went again the following day, but Gustav Vasa did not return. Day after day she sat upon the same spot, gazing with large, still eyes toward Upsala. She listened to the rustling of the trees overhead ; the days came and went like years. No tidings reached her from the outside world ; neither did she desire them. She was busy with the world within ; and it would seem as though she took counsel of the venerable trees, as they shed their withered leaves upon the Runic stones.

Weeks passed. Everywhere, even to the shores of the Baltic, the Swedish arms were victorious. Stockholm alone resisted. It was besieged by an army composed of Swedes and of auxiliaries from Lübeck. The surrender was imminent, when once more a cry of horror rang through Sweden. Like fire the dreadful tidings spread, that Gustav Erikson's mother and sisters, who, since the beginning of the rising, had remained in Stockholm, had been murdered at the command of Christian of Denmark.

It was toward evening when the news reached Old Upsala, and the bearer told Karine that Gustav Vasa, since he had learned the cruel fate of his relatives, had not been seen by any one. The greatest consternation prevailed in Upsala, for, refusing food and drink, he had secluded himself. Persons who had listened at his door had heard — those who knew him refused to believe it — but they swore they had heard him weep.

Slowly, without answering, Karine took her accustomed way to Odin's Hill. As usual, she sat upon the ancient stone and gazed into the evening sun until the golden balls of Upsala's cathedral glittered in its light. Then she fell upon her knees, and pressed her forehead to the cold granite. With a calm face she rose again, and descended the hillside in the direction of the road leading to Upsala. She followed this road, walking without haste, until she reached the town, where she asked to be shown to Gustav Vasa's house. A little girl led the way. The officers, who were standing irresolute at the door, made way for her; and in answer to her questions, directed her to the room into which the commander had withdrawn.

“Karine Stenbock wishes to speak with Gustav Vasa.” To their unspeakable surprise the door was hastily opened; but Karine closed it immediately after she had entered, and, fixing her eyes upon the pale, haggard face of the man before her, she said, —

“A Swedish woman’s word is not like that of Christian of Denmark. I will be mother and sister to you, Gustav Vasa.”





CHAPTER VIII.

AUTUMN had come. A year had passed since Gustav Erikson first saw the Rose of the Trollhätta. Much sorrow and woe had been poured out over Sweden by the hand of Christian of Denmark ; great joy and consolation had come through Gustav Erikson, while the earth had completed its course around the sun ; and now autumn was come again.

Warm, sunny, northern Autumn. Beneath the blue sky, the golden balls upon the cathedral spires of Upsala shone far into the distance ; they gleamed above the wild green forest, past rocks and brushwood, past the golden-brown tops of the beeches upon the royal mounds at Old Upsala, even to the shining, tranquil sea. Heaven and earth seemed steeped in blue and golden light ; and joy shone

from the blue eyes of the men, women, and maidens in Upsala. For half a league beyond the city, the broad highway was lined with eager crowds ; from Westermanland and Södermannland they came ; from the Svea-land, and, farther still, from the icy lakes of Norrland and Norrbotten.

Expectantly all eyes gazed southward, for from thence he was to come, — he whose name none need mention who spoke of his deeds, — no longer now the “ Lord and Captain of Sweden,” but its king, Gustav Vasa. For a week past, the Diet had been assembled at Strengnäs, and two days ago it had chosen Gustav Vasa King of Sweden.

And now he appeared. His eyes wore a gentler look than his new subjects had ever seen there. The warmth, the brightness, the sunny joyousness of the autumn day lay upon him. In regal attire, his ermine cloak sweeping the flanks of the horse that bore him so proudly, he rode beside the milk-white palfrey of Karine Stenbock, the royal bride of Sweden. She, too, bowed graciously to right and left. She wore no ermine cloak, but the jubilant throng was enraptured with her beauty, — with her golden hair, that streamed from under the

circlet upon her brow, falling in streams of brightness over her neck and shoulders.

Suddenly the smile vanished from Karine's lips, and a thoughtful, strangely serious expression took its place. She lifted her hand ; something was fluttering toward her through the tranquil air, — a white butterfly, with red spots upon his wings. Fearlessly he rested upon her hand, as upon the edge of a flower, and spread his wings. The women in the crowd saw it, and hailed the happy omen : the royal butterfly had come down from the mountains to greet Sweden's queen.

Why does Sweden's queen gaze upon the white butterfly so absently, so lost in dreams, that she fails to see the people's joy at the peaceful omen? Is her ear listening westward, through the still air? Does she hear, faintly in the distance, the roaring of the Trollhätta? No ; it is too far, — she hears only the rustling in the beech-tops on Odin's Hill. They, too, send their greeting to Karine's mute eyes ; gently their branches sway against the sky.

Karine started ; the drums beat a flourish ; they were entering Upsala.

The burgomaster of the city, surrounded by its

senators and dignitaries, welcomed the King of Sweden in a solemn oration, to which the latter listened with exemplary patience, although he breathed more freely when the speech reached its end. The procession moved on, its destination known to all. The streets through which it passed were converted into a forest, the ground covered with a carpet of rushes and pine-boughs. Now the cathedral, in its gigantic proportions, rose before them; under the portal the Archbishop of Upsala, in full canonicals, and surrounded by his clergy, awaited them. In spite of his trailing ermine, the young king sprang lightly from his horse, and lifted Karine from hers. Both bowed before the archbishop, who lifted his hands in blessing, and, preceding them, walked toward the altar. The interior of the church was not ornamented. In marvellous beauty and purity of form, the Gothic pillars, tall and slender, like clustering sheaves, rose to a dizzy height, sustaining the noble arch that hung above the central nave. Through the tinted windows streamed a tender, mellowed light, mingling strangely with the light of innumerable candles, that surrounded the altar and

gleamed upon its gold-embroidered cloth. The immediate retinue of the royal pair filled a large portion of the vast space. Behind them thronged the multitude, pouring into the church, or climbing recklessly to the high windows, hoping to catch, at least from the outside, a glimpse of what was going on within. There "King Gösta" and Karine Stenbock were to be married by the Primate of Sweden.

Just as the solemn ceremony was about to begin, a man was seen forcing his way through the crowd. He whispered some words to the king, who, with a short excuse, followed the messenger and disappeared. The people gazed after him in astonishment, as he left his beautiful bride standing between her father and her blind mother; and an excited hum of voices ran through the church. But in a few moments the king reappeared. With beaming face, he approached the archbishop, and said, —

"Permit me, most reverend lord, to speak before you in this holy place. It will not be profaned by my words, for, like yours, they come from God."

He rapidly ascended the altar-steps, and spoke

in a voice that rang loud and clear through the vast cathedral arches, —

“Heaven sends two greetings to the people of Sweden. Stockholm is ours! This morning, at sunrise, the Danish commander surrendered the keys!”

Like one great cry of joy, it burst from a thousand lips. The last, longed-for end was reached, — Sweden was free! The stormy rejoicings of the multitude were not to be restrained. Each embraced and kissed his neighbor. From a thousand voices the cry surged upward and echoed back from the arched roof.

“Long live King Gustav! Sweden is free!”

“And so it will continue,” Gustav Vasa’s voice rang out above the tumult, “for I have another message to deliver to the people of Sweden. The ambassador whom I sent to the Emperor Charles V. has returned. The Emperor renounces the cause of his brother-in-law, Christian of Denmark, and offers to Sweden his friendship and recognition. The Danish people have risen against their king, and put him under the ban.”

Karine’s eyes shone with a new light when the

king clasped her hand, and leading her to the altar, whispered, —

“And thus the second condition is fulfilled, Karine, before you become mine, — Sweden is free.”

She did not look into his face as she answered, “Yes; all the conditions are fulfilled, — Sweden is free — ”

“And you are its queen.”

A quiver ran through the young girl's frame, — a feeling at once of pride and of awe. Firmly she stepped upon the velvet carpet.

“In the name of Almighty God, I greet you, Gustav, King of Sweden, whom the Nobles and Commons of the land have chosen as their king. Generations of kings have come and gone. Upon this spot, the priests of another faith placed the crown upon the brow of the Ynglings, who deemed themselves the Sons of Odin, the mighty; but they fell, like the leaves in autumn, and their memory has passed away. Here the proud Folkungs received the crown from the hands of holy men, and were anointed with holy oil from Rome; but, like the foam of the sea, their traces have

vanished. Many came after them, with great names and proud hearts, from near and from far ; they were anointed, and crowned, — but where is their record? It is not the drop of oil from human hands that makes small things great, and exalts the lowly ; it is the Spirit of the living God, which must uphold the mightiest among men, lest their memory perish from among the righteous. — Thus I greet you, Gustav Vasa, in the ancient city of kings ; and I joyfully lift up my hands to the great King over us all, and give Him thanks."

Thus began the venerable archbishop of Upsala. Solemnly and powerfully his words rolled over the thousands of bowed heads. As the wind stirs the sails of a ship, so they stirred the heart of each Swedish hearer, who heard in them the promise of a great and glorious future. Most deeply of all, they moved Karine Stenbock, who looked up with admiration to the majestic figure by her side : to the man whom she heard praised as an instrument of heaven ; whom his people worshipped ; and who had chosen her, from among all others, to help him to complete his work, — after the struggle

for peace, after the victory by the sword, to establish the supremacy of right and liberty. Yes; proud and happy at last, Karine looked upon the ermine that fell from the shoulders of her royal bridegroom. It seemed as though she heard from above a rustling like that of the beech-tops on Odin's Hill: "To help others, and to serve a worthy end."

How far otherwise than she had imagined, events had shaped themselves! How far more perfectly would a queen succeed in realizing those high endeavors which the sunbeams above the slumbering world had revealed to her soul! And this duty was her choice, — her proud and willing choice.

And proudly, joyfully, Karine's eyes, during the archbishop's sermon, looked on high and at the listening crowd that thronged about the altar.

Suddenly the beautiful eyes quiver; their blue light is fixed upon a pillar of red porphyry which, to the right of the altar, bears the arch of the central nave. The daylight does not reach it, nor the light from the tapers: only a reflection from both surrounds it with a magic mingling of light and

darkness. It illumines the head of a spectator, who leans against the pillar, his eyes fixed upon the altar. Like the dim light that plays around it, the pale face has a ghostly aspect. From a distance, one cannot tell whether it is old or young. The features, the tall, slender figure, seem youthful; but the hair, lying in heavy waves upon his brow, does not betoken youth. It has been golden, and a glimmer of the gold shines through it still; but it seems as if ashes were strewn upon it; and ashes cover the eyes, for they are more lifeless than Brita Stenbock's blind eyes, which attend so eagerly to the prelate's earnest words, as though they saw through them far into the future.

Many eyes hung upon the young girl who was now Sweden's queen, and followed her glance. Many turned, seeking the favored object; and many whispered, —

“Who is the man over yonder with the strange face? The queen is looking at him.”

“Hush!” answered a voice, silencing the whisperers. “It is the king's ambassador to the German Emperor, who has just returned. He is no doubt surprised to see what an angel's face Gustav

has found during his absence. You can well see that he never in his life beheld anything so lovely. But listen to the archbishop, — the most important part is still to come."

The voices were hushed ; and all eyes turned toward the dignitary of the Church, who held in a jewelled dish the plain circlets of gold, the symbol of fidelity to kings and peasants alike. Only Karine Stenbock's eyes did not move ; and the eyes of the man by the pillar gazed, immovable, expressionless.

"Karine," the mute, lustreless eyes seemed to say, "by the Trollhätta's brink stood the venerable bard, and looked down into its waters. Life flowed around him ; the sunshine rested upon his brow ; the birds sang ; the flowers nodded, — and he shuddered before the weird figure rising from the whirling foam, and stretching forth its arms to clutch him. He tried to flee, but the spell was upon him, compelling him to gaze into the thundering waters ; and involuntarily he was drawn nearer and nearer, until, overpowered by the spirits of the deep, he sprang down, and the dazzling foam hid him forever."

The archbishop took the cold, lifeless hand of the royal bride of Sweden, and slipped the ring upon her finger. Breathless stood the waiting multitude.

“Karine,” said the sad eyes over yonder, “were those the lips that said, ‘Do not grow weary, Gustav’? Were those the lips that whispered, ‘Do not forsake Karine’? Was it Gustav Vasa to whom they said, ‘I love you so dearly, Gustav — so dearly’?”

“The Almighty God bless you and keep you, King and Queen of Sweden. May He rule your hearts for your own happiness, and for the welfare of your country! May He lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace!”

Like a plain citizen, Gustav Vasa bent down and kissed his wife. As if awaking from a dream, the Queen of Sweden started, and turned her eyes away from the face by the pillar; with an uncertain glance, they wandered over the snowy ermine of her royal husband. Her limbs tottered; shuddering, she stretched out her hands, and with the cry, “You are the Trollhätta,” fell fainting into Gustav Erikson’s arms. There was only one in the vast

throng who understood, and but a few who heard her words. The rest only saw from afar how the young queen sank into her husband's arms, which closed firmly around her. They did not see how the king held and supported her lifeless body, whispering loving words into her ear.

Karine slowly recovered, and, taking her husband's arm, walked with a firm step out of the church. The royal retinue followed, and after them the jubilant people. In a few minutes the lofty cathedral arches were deserted, save by the one who alone had understood the words Karine of Sweden had spoken.

He still stood upon the same spot. The tapers were extinguished, and the daylight entered faintly through the tinted windows. The mute, lustreless eyes were still fixed upon the empty space before the altar. The sexton came and gazed astonished at the lonely visitor.

"Are you ill, sir?" he asked respectfully. Then Gustav Rosen started, looked at him, and silently left the church.

When the wedding procession had crossed the bridge of the Fyris River, King Gustav paused for

a moment, and pointed to a green hill, gently sloping southward, that rose to the west of Upsala, overlooking the city.

"We will build ourselves a castle over yonder, Karine, and be happy," he said softly, bending down to his youthful helpmate.

She looked up: "Yes; and we can see the trees on Odin's Hill from there," she answered earnestly.

The people crowded after the royal pair to the house which the city had prepared for their wedding festivities. It was the stateliest building in Upsala; and the early twilight saw a sumptuous feast spread in its spacious halls. At the head of the table sat the first royal couple Sweden had known for half a century. To the left of Gustav Vasa was seen the serene face of the Primate of Sweden. The king was earnestly conversing with him, in the midst of all the surrounding mirth and happiness, concerning the new spiritual light which had arisen in Germany; and with pleasure the gentlemen from Lübeck heard from the king's lips an oft-recurring, well-known name. Finally the latter raised his glass and spoke in a clear, loud voice, —

“Nobles and Commons of the Kingdom of Sweden! My first greeting is to the freedom of our country. But you have learned that freedom rests in the spirit of man, — not in his hands; that a nation may shake off the yoke of slavery even though its hands are fettered, if its spirit be free. The liberty which I mean, and which I desire to give you, has naught to do with the taking of Stockholm, nor with the fall of Christian of Denmark. It is not born of the earth; and God has chosen a greater than myself to proclaim it. In accordance with the usage of our fathers, I drink to the health of the Monk of Wittenberg. May his work prosper; may the fetters of Rome everywhere burst asunder! My greeting is to Martin Luther!”

With one impulse, all who sat around the long table sprang to their feet. Like a glowing spark, his words had fallen into each heart; but all eyes turned anxiously to the tall and venerable figure at the king's left hand. Then a deafening shout of applause burst forth. With a firm hand the Archbishop of Upsala raised his glass, touched with it that of the king, and said, —

“To the health of Martin Luther!”

Karine's glass met her husband's with a clear ring. Now, according to ancient Swedish custom, the “skåls” flew back and forth. There was at once a strange likeness and a strange contrast between this feast and the one which in the early spring had taken place in the now crumbling walls of Torpa. Many of the same faces were assembled here, but how greatly changed! Careless good-humor spoke from Gustav Stenbock's strong features. The blind face beside him had lost the look of scorn with which it had met Christian of Denmark; and again Karine sat beside a king of Sweden, not trembling, not feverishly flushing and paling, but with steadfast, serious eyes, beautiful and calm,—beautiful as the mild autumn that smiled upon Sweden's new-won liberty, calm as the beeches upon Odin's Hill that lifted their branches into the blue sky.

And at the opposite end of the table there sat again a silent guest, who touched neither food nor drink. Far away from him, beyond the quivering lights, sat the Queen of Sweden; but beyond her, infinitely distant, like a vision in a dream, the

Karine Stenbock of old floated before his eyes. He saw a rocky valley, through which thundered the Trollhätta ; there stood Karine, her golden hair gleaming in the sunlight, and said, "Do not weep, Gustav ; when I am a woman, I will go with you to Denmark."

The ringing of glasses, the loud joy around him, drowned the words so softly spoken by the dream-vision, which, so far away, and yet so bright and sunny, smiled from behind the Queen of Sweden's chair into his dim, sorrowful eyes.

Through tears it smiled, pleading : "Do not weep, Gustav ; I will be your wife, and we will go together to Denmark."

A tear fell from the eye of the silent guest, upon his untouched plate. And again Gustav Rosen was startled, as his neighbor to the right asked kindly, "Are you ill, sir?"

Without answering, he rose, and was about to leave the room, when he encountered the eye of the king, who had also risen from his seat.

"The king speaks, — silence !" it ran through the assemblage. Every voice was hushed, and Gustav Vasa spoke : —

“We have drunk the health of many brave men, of whose valiant deeds in Sweden’s behalf we were the witnesses. But noble deeds have been done in secret; battles have been fought, perhaps the fiercest of all, which no human eye has seen. I drink to those who first won the victory over themselves before they could recognize the eternal justice of our cause. I drink to the man who accomplished the difficult task of weaning the German Emperor from the cause of his relative, and of gaining him for us; to the man, without whose courage the mother of your queen would not be among us; to whom we all owe thanks, you as well as I, — to you, Gustav Rosen!”

The king drained his glass, and the rest followed his example. Gustav Vasa only remembered the night in which he had rescued from Torpa and from a cruel death King Christian’s victims, — the night in which Rosen realized the magnitude of his own guilt; realized that, in serving the Danish tyrant, he had served an unworthy cause, and, in expiation, offered himself for any service in his country’s behalf. With wise forethought, Gustav Vasa sent him as ambassador to the Emperor Charles V.

Had he other, unspoken motives in sending the youth on so distant a journey? Unconsciously, perhaps ; but now they were long since forgotten. He only remembered Karine's "Never," when upon the waters of the Göta-Elf he had asked, "Will you return to Gustav Rosen?" — "Never!" she had replied ; "between us lies an abyss, as between this side and that of the Trollhätta. My heart no longer belongs to the man who could betray Sweden."

Gustav Rosen never had understood Karine's eyes, that loved Sweden ; and what does Gustav Vasa know of the eyes that loved Gustav Rosen?

Had Gustav Erikson's ambassador thought to expiate another crime? Had he hoped to return and say, "I was stricken with blindness when I betrayed Sweden ; now I have helped to save your country and mine"?

But the road is long from the Trollhätta to the Alps. When Gustav Rosen came back to Upsala, the cathedral bells were ringing, all the bells in Sweden were ringing, for the marriage of its queen.

He was a proud, knightly king in whose hand she had placed her own ; he was a strong, a wise, and a noble man.

Probably there was not a maiden in all the Swedish land who did not to-day envy Karine's fate ; and many a man would have prized less highly Gustav Vasa's new crown than the white pearl by his side, that seemed to have risen from the snowy foam of the Trollhätta. She too had risen at her husband's words. A glance, her first, sought Rosen's eyes. For a moment the Queen of Sweden vanished ; the distant dream-vision approached, and stood lonely and strange in the festive hall at Upsala. Then Karine looked away, and it faded once more into the distance, dim, vague, forever unattainable.

Deeper sank the darkness, and with midnight silence came into the house. Silence lay upon the vast Swedish kingdom ; only a northern light, its gleaming rays darting through the midnight sky, stood above the ancient royal city.





CHAPTER IX.

THE morning rose in golden splendor upon the liberated land. The young king generously permitted the Danish garrison of Stockholm to return to their homes. Humanity and justice began their reign in Sweden. A rare, summer-like autumn smiled upon the newly won freedom. As far as the eye could reach, the grain-fields were green with the harvest of the coming year; and for the second time white blossoms covered the fruit-trees. Springtime and autumn met in a brotherly embrace, and the winter's strength seemed forever broken. With rejoicing the people gathered their rich harvest, and their trusting gratitude revered their king and queen as the source of the many blessings which, after long years of slavery and strife, were showered in almost miracu-

lous profusion upon the land. They associated Karine most closely with their new prosperity; Karine, whose eyes never wearied of seeking out the needy; who, with the beauty and winsomeness of youth, with the wisdom of riper years, realized not the dignity only, but the earnest duties of a kingly crown. Her ear was open to all; and when, upon her white horse, followed by a single servant, she rode through the village streets, all eyes kindled with hope and gladness, and with shouts of joy the children ran into the houses to carry the news of the "good queen's" coming. The king observed with pleasure how she won the hearts of the people. Sometimes he accompanied her upon her errands of mercy; more frequently, the arduous labors which the necessary reorganization of national affairs exacted, kept him at his post; and Karine rode alone through the sunny, autumnal country, followed at a distance by her squire. Lost in revery, she gazed at the distant landscape; but her thoughts remained unspoken, even in the secrecy of her own heart. She often took the road that led seawards, whence, from a rise in the ground, she could see in the distance

the glittering blue mirror. Here, her servant knew, the hours became as minutes ; until at last he would approach, and point to the sinking sun. Then she would turn her horse and ride homeward, and the villagers saw always the same sweetness and tranquillity upon their young queen's beautiful face.

One day she was returning by the usual road. It was just a year since she had first met Gustav Vasa by the brink of the Trollhätta ; longer than usual she had looked into the endless distance, where sky and water seemed to meet. When she saw the square church-tower of Old Upsala through the leafless trees, a sudden unrest seemed to awake within her. She glanced upwards at the tall trees that from the summit of the kings' mounds overshadowed the village, beckoned to her servant to continue his road to Upsala, and then turned aside. She did not enter the village ; but riding through the meadows, she reached the foot of Odin's Hill, where she dismounted, leaving her horse to wait for her return.

"You will wait for me," she said softly, laying her hand upon its slender neck. "You always carry me back into the king's house."

Slowly she climbed the hill ; her trailing garments, probably, or the dead leaves, that rustled about her feet, impeded her walk, for she often paused as if with weariness. When she reached the summit, the setting sun met her eyes with dazzling light. Green and melancholy, the level rays lay upon the silent valley and upon the brown leaves, which had dropped from the trees, and now completely covered the Runic stone. But Karine knew every line and crevice as intimately as though her own heart's blood had been shed there. Mechanically she moved to the spot where her strength had failed her, on the day when Gustav Vasa, in his anguish, had left her ; where she had lain upon her knees, and pressed her face against the cold granite, before she set out upon her errand to Upsala. Again her knees trembled ; a wild grief distorted the calm features of the young queen's face, and it seemed as if a cry of agony must burst from her throbbing heart.

Something rustled among the dry leaves, and, startled, she looked up. Her eyes met the golden balls of the cathedral spires at Upsala, reflecting the sunshine above the sombre pine-woods ; and

the sunbeams wound their golden threads around a tall figure leaning motionless against a tree. He turned ; a low cry escaped him ; it was Gustav Rosen. Across the leaf-strewn stone, the blue eyes found each other, as they had so often done from the earliest days of their happy childhood. They found and held each other — speechless, immovable — for the space of a minute ; then, with a convulsive sob, the young man turned and walked down the hill toward the meadows.

“Gustav !” Karine called. He heard her, paused, and went on.

“Gustav, stay. Your queen commands —” It was not said in a commanding tone ; unspeakable sorrow spoke from her imperious words. They did not command, — they entreated. Sad as death, Gustav Rosen came toward her.

With a firm step Karine went to meet him. The pain in her face had vanished ; her heart no longer throbbed ; her eyes were as tranquil as the peaceful landscape around her.

“We must take leave for a while, Gustav.” Her voice did not falter ; her hand held his in a warm clasp. “We often said farewell when we

were children, when the sun went down. But it always rose again."

With her other hand she pointed to the fiery ball, whose last rays fell between them; from the tree overhead the last sere leaf floated downward, and rested upon her golden hair. With a sad smile, she took it and held it out to him.

"You gave me many flowers in remembrance of happy summer days," she said; "they bloomed beyond the Trollhätta; but now the fall has come, and I have nothing to give you in remembrance but this withered leaf."

As he took it, it fell to pieces in his hand. Then for the first time he opened his lips, speaking in whispers, to conceal the trembling of his voice, —

"Tell me one thing, Karine, and I will quietly take leave of you. Tell me only this, — are you happy? Do you love Gustav Vasa?"

She turned her eyes toward the golden balls upon the cathedral spires. "The woman whose husband he is, is blessed above many," she said softly.

"Do you love Gustav Vasa, Karine?" He repeated the question, his voice shaking with pain-

fully suppressed emotion. A moment would decide the fate of two human lives. Karine lifted her blue eyes to those of her lover, and said firmly, —

“Yes.”

The sun had set, and the chilly night-wind sighed through the branches overhead. A wild, agonized cry broke from Gustav Rosen's lips; half unconsciously, he stretched out his arms and clasped the woman by his side.

But she quickly freed herself. “Sweden's queen can safely enter every house and cottage in the land, and encounter every forest solitude. Shall it be your fault, Gustav, if she no longer can do this?” she asked sternly.

Tears streamed down his face. His arms fell to his side as if paralyzed. But once more her arms were folded about his neck; once more her eyes, with all the vanished glory of the past contained in one glance, looked into his.

“Farewell, Gustav,” her lips said, and kissed him.

Like a white star, the Queen of Sweden upon her white horse vanished in the twilight, along the edge of the dark pine forest.

Calm as ever, she entered her husband's house, and lovingly, with gentle hands, smoothed from his brow the furrows of care. Many were the cares that crowded upon the young king, driving sleep from his eyes, and so, the old chronicle relates, he lay sleepless one night, when Karine opened her lips, and murmured some words. As he bent over her, she spoke in her dreams, —

“Gustav Vasa, the king, I love most dearly; yet
Gustav Rosen, my first love, I'll nevermore forget.”

Nevermore, — the waves of the Mälar have heard it, and tell it further. Lake Hjelmars carries it to the boundless waters of Lake Wener; and past the rocky portals, through which the green river rushes, — then come the Falls of Trollhätta.

They approach, gently flowing, like the destiny of a human soul, — peaceful, transparent, kissing the nodding, overhanging grasses; then a little whirlpool, a quicker movement, imperceptible, unheeded, and the stillness, the calmness, have gone, never to return. More hastily they flow, still more hastily they are driven, drawn, compelled, — until suddenly they plunge headlong, thunder-

ing, into the all-devouring abyss, from whence no arm can raise the doomed ones.

These are the Falls of Trollhätta. They thunder through days and through centuries. The child playing upon their brink becomes a man, and his hair grows white with age ; and when, at the end of his life, he totters forth, leaning upon his staff, they are the same as they were at its beginning, — wreathed in flowers, like the spring-time ; white as winter's snow.

Thus they have thundered for thousands of years before human ears were near to hear. Far over the rocks they fling their silvery spray, upon which, in bright and joyous colors, glistens the sunlight. But beneath this veil of dazzling majesty and beauty seethe and toss the troubled, stormy waters.

It is well for him who would forget, to sit by the waters of the Trollhätta ; their thunder will drown the voices of the past.

THE END.



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